

Picture of Elegance

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Picture of Elegance

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Summary

When Dr. Ellis rings in sick after catching a nasty cold just before day shift ends, only one doctor is up to taking a night shift and that is Dr. Mohan.

Everyone is surprised to see her arrival in a cocktail dress and seemingly have left a date to work the shift. Especially Jack Abbot.

—

Or where Samira takes a night shift to bolt out of a date and Jack is going through it after seeing her all dressed up.

—

Or the one where they hook up after a 12 hour shift filled with tension

19:00 - 03:00

Hour 1

The clock above the nurses' station ticked loudly, each second dragging longer than the last. Dana scrubbed a hand down her face, trying to stay patient. The day shift was supposed to be *done* — charts signed, patients handed over, and her butt halfway out the door. But then Dr. Ellis rang in, voice barely a croak, saying she couldn't even stand without getting dizzy.

Now it was her, Jack, and Robby huddled over the charge desk, going down the list of available doctors... and getting nowhere. Especially because Robby refused to ask any of his day shift doctors to extend because of the shit day they just had.

"Parsons is on vacation," Dana muttered, scratching another name off.

"Nguyen's already pulling a double," Jack added, flipping through the schedule.

"And pretty sure Romero's dead to the world. I called twice, went straight to voicemail," Robby said, dropping his phone on the counter in defeat. They all exchanged a look — the *we're screwed* kind.

Dana sighed, already peeling her phone from her pocket. "Only one person left to try. She's supposed to be off, but..." She didn't finish the thought, just started dialing.

Jack leaned back against the counter, arms crossed, looking half-expectant, half-resigned. "Who?"

"Dr. Mohan."

Jack blinked. "*Samira?*" he echoed, just as Dana turned away, phone pressed to her ear.

"Hey, Samira, it's Dana," Dana said quickly. "I know it's your day off, but Dr. Ellis just dropped out and we're desperate. Is there any chance —?"

Pause.

Jack couldn't hear the reply, but Dana gave a short relieved laugh. "You're a *lifesaver*. Seriously. See you soon."

She hung up and turned back to them, smiling. "She's coming."

Robby let out a low whistle. "Did not expect that miracle."

Jack just nodded, feeling something tight in his chest unclench. Night shift wasn't totally doomed, after all. About fifteen minutes later, just as Dana was pulling her bag over her shoulder to finally leave, the ER doors slid open with a *hiss*. In walked Samira Mohan.

The hallway lights hit her first — the soft shimmer of her navy cocktail dress, the elegant cut of it hugging her frame, the delicate heels clicking against the tile. Her dark hair was loosely pinned back, and her makeup, still perfect, made her look like she belonged in a restaurant downtown, not a chaotic emergency department. Conversation around the desk dropped instantly. Jack stared, heart thudding painfully against his ribs.

Dana let out a low, amused whistle. "Holy hell, Mohan," she said, grinning wide. "Tell me you were on a date."

Samira slipped off her dark coat, somehow making the whole thing look even more unfair. She gave a wry smile, tucking a stray curl behind her ear. "I was," she said. "And thank *god* you called me. It was awful."

Dana laughed. "Well, you're saving our asses tonight, so... silver linings."

Jack was still staring — not that he realized it until Robby leaned in and elbowed him, grinning like an idiot. "*Pick your jaw up off the floor, lover boy.*"

Jack snapped his mouth shut, face heating. "Shut up," he muttered under his breath, glancing away — but not for long.

He couldn't help it. Samira looked like a dream. And she was about to spend the entire night shift working beside him, smelling like perfume and the image of her looking like *that* burned on the back of his head.

He was so, so screwed. Jack stood there, useless, probably looking like a complete idiot. He opened his mouth, but nothing remotely intelligent came out.

"Uh—Dr. Mohan," he finally managed, clearing his throat. "If you want... I could grab you a coffee? Before we get started?"

Samira turned toward him, smile polite, eyes steady. "Thank you, Dr. Abbot, but I'm going to change first. I'll grab some after."

Her voice was all professionalism, but there was a flicker of warmth there too — something that caught and tugged low in Jack's chest. She moved past him with a nod, heels clicking down the hall toward the on-call rooms. Jack watched her go like a man witnessing a miracle.

Behind him, Robby snorted loudly. "*Jesus*, man. Try not to pass out."

Jack rubbed the back of his neck, heat prickling up his spine. "*Shut up.*"

But Robby wasn't done. He clapped Jack on the shoulder — hard. "Listen, you thirsty bastard," he said, half-laughing, half-dead serious. "If there's so much as a *scratch* on Mohan by the end of this shift... I'm killing you."

Jack let out a weak, disbelieving laugh. "I'm not gonna— She's perfectly capable—"

"I know she is," Robby said, voice softening. "But she's still *new* to this chaos. And she's my smartest resident, alright? So... eyes sharp. Hands clean."

Jack held up both hands in surrender, even as his heart thudded painfully in his chest. "Got it."

But as he watched the corridor where Samira had disappeared, the truth gnawed quietly at the back of his mind: He was already a lost cause. Dana clipped her ID badge back onto her bag with a tired sigh. "Alright, this circus is yours now," she said, shooting Jack a teasing

smile. "Try not to burn it down."

Robby grabbed his hoodie from the back of a chair, slinging it over one shoulder. "And remember what I said," he added as he passed Jack — pointing two fingers at his own eyes, then turning them dramatically toward Jack.

"Watching you, Abbot."

Dana snickered. "You're so dramatic."

"Yeah, well," Robby said, jerking a thumb toward the hallway where Samira had disappeared, "I gotta keep our resident ER princess safe."

"She's more likely to save *us*," Dana said with a laugh, bumping Robby's shoulder as they headed for the doors.

Jack just shook his head, muttering, "I'll survive," even though he wasn't entirely convinced of it.

The automatic doors hissed shut behind them, leaving the emergency department quieter for a brief moment — the hum of monitors, the distant ring of a phone. Jack rubbed the back of his neck, glancing down the hall. A few minutes later, the on-call door swung open again.

Jack looked up.

Samira stepped out, now dressed in dark scrubs and practical

sneakers, her stethoscope thrown over her neck. Her hair was tied up in a loose bun, wisps falling around her face, and she was wiping off the last traces of her makeup with a makeup wipe as she walked. And somehow — *somehow* — Jack thought she looked even more devastating like this. The polished edges of earlier were gone, replaced by the real Samira: sharp, quick, quietly steady in a storm. The shift in her posture was subtle — shoulders set, steps sure — like she was sliding right into her element.

Jack's heart gave a helpless little lurch.

She caught him staring and raised an eyebrow, a ghost of a smile playing on her lips.

"Dr. Abbot," she said lightly, balling up the makeup wipe and tossing it into a nearby trash bin. "You still offering that coffee?"

Jack straightened, grateful for something — *anything* — to do. "Yeah. Yeah, of course."

He scrambled to grab a fresh cup from the break room, cursing himself under his breath the whole way.

Play it cool, Abbot. You're getting too old for this. She's just another doctor. Just—

Samira leaned against the counter when he returned, watching him with mild amusement, arms crossed casually over her scrub top.

"Thanks," she said when he handed her the coffee, fingers brushing his for the briefest second. Jack nodded stiffly, every nerve ending sparking to life. "No problem."

She took a sip, hummed appreciatively, then pushed off the counter. "Alright. Let's go save some lives."

She flashed him a small, wry smile before heading toward the trauma bays, coffee in hand, navy scrubs disappearing into the organized chaos. Jack stood there for a beat longer, clutching his clipboard like an idiot. Somewhere in the back of his mind, Robby's warning echoed again —

Eyes sharp. Hands clean.

Jack blew out a breath, shook himself, and jogged after her. If he was going to make it through this shift alive, he was going to need all the self-control he had left.

Hour 2

The trauma pagers went off: two-car collision, multiple incoming. Jack was already pulling on gloves by the time Samira joined him at the trauma bay, tying her hair tighter with a no-nonsense flick of her wrist. She tossed back the last of her coffee, pitched the empty cup into the trash, and was all business when she turned to him.

"You're leading Bay 2?" she asked, already grabbing supplies.

Jack nodded, a little surprised — not because she asked, but because of how steady, how *sure* she sounded. No second-guessing. No hesitation. Just a clean, professional pivot to the chaos about to come through the doors.

"I'll take Bay 3," Samira said.

She was already moving, snapping on gloves, rolling her shoulders like she was warming up before a fight.

Jack watched her for a second longer than he should have — not just because she looked good (although, God help him, she did), but because he realised something he hadn't let himself think about until now: She wasn't the same green, cautious resident from six months ago.

The Pittfest mass casualty incident tested all of them. That night had been hell. But it brought the best out of her. Samira had *stayed*. Had fought. Had learned. She drilled a damn burr hole with an IO drill. Jack may not have witnessed it but she was the talk of the town for it.

Now? Now she moved with this quiet confidence that wasn't cocky, but earned. The kind of steady you wanted at your side when everything else was going sideways. The trauma doors banged open, snapping Jack out of it.

"Alright, let's work!" he barked, falling into the rhythm as paramedics flooded in, rattling off vitals.

He barely had time to glance toward Bay 3, but every time he caught a glimpse of Samira — directing the nurses, barking orders clean and calm, assessing patients with quick, practiced hands — something inside him twisted, warm and proud and dangerously *fond*.

At one point, he saw her lean over a patient, rapid-firing instructions with that same calm authority, her brow furrowed in concentration. Jack couldn't help the stupid smile tugging at his mouth. *Yeah*, he thought, working the intubation on his side, *Robby's right to have a soft spot for her*.

He had one too.

Maybe a little more than "soft."

Maybe a lot more than was safe.

It had calmed for maybe a minute — a single, blessed minute of controlled chaos — before the shouts broke out. Jack spun toward the sound just in time to see one of the collision patients — a younger man, wild-eyed, thrashing against the straps of the gurney — break free. It happened so fast.

One second Samira was reaching for her stethoscope to re-check vitals, and the next, the patient lunged, shoving her hard into a nearby gurney with a brutal crash of metal on metal. Samira cried out — a short, sharp sound of pain — as she crumpled to the floor. Jack was there in a heartbeat, shoving past two nurses, instincts razor-sharp.

"Security! *Now!*" he barked, even as he dropped to one knee beside Samira.

She was curled slightly, one hand braced on the ground, teeth gritted against the pain. Her scrubs were rumpled, the loose bun at the back of her head half-fallen. Jack's heart pounded in his ears.

"Samira—" he said tightly, barely keeping the panic out of his voice, "don't move. Just— just stay there a second."

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw security finally storm in, wrestling the patient back down onto the gurney. Dr. Shen, who had been overseeing the next bay, swooped in immediately, barking orders to

sedate and restrain the patient properly. Jack blocked all of it out, focusing entirely on Samira.

"You with me?" he asked quietly, scanning her for obvious injuries.

Samira nodded once, breathless. "Yeah. Just... just hit my back weird."

Jack exhaled sharply through his nose, relief and anger warring inside him. He wanted to rip that psychotic patient apart with his bare hands — but Samira was conscious, talking, and that was what mattered right now.

"Alright," Jack said, softer now. "Let's get you sitting up slowly."

He helped her shift upright, careful to support her shoulders. His hands were steady even if inside, he felt like a live wire about to snap. Samira winced but managed to sit, both palms flat on the tile floor for balance. "God," she muttered under her breath. "That's gonna bruise."

Jack couldn't help the low, humorless laugh that escaped him. "You think?"

She shot him a tired glare — but there was a flicker of gratitude in her eyes too, something raw and unspoken passing between them.

"Hey." Jack tipped his head, voice gentling. "You good? For real?"

Samira hesitated for a beat — the tiniest beat — before nodding. "Yeah. I'm good."

Jack wasn't sure he believed her, not entirely. But he also knew better than to push her right now, not in front of everyone. Behind them, Dr. Shen's voice rose over the chaos. "Patient sedated and stable," he announced, shooting Jack a look. "You good over there?"

Jack glanced at Samira — bruised, but stubborn as ever.

"We're good," he said grimly, still hovering close enough that his shoulder brushed hers when she shifted. Samira finally managed to stand, Jack's hand steady under her elbow until she waved him off with a small shake of her head. Proud. Independent. Still rattled underneath it. Jack watched her, chest tight, as she adjusted her coat and turned back to work like nothing had happened.

But Jack had seen it.

Had felt the fear spike inside him like a knife the second she'd gone down. And no matter how calm he played it now, he knew — deep down — he wasn't going to be able to forget that moment anytime soon. Samira brushed off the encounter like it was nothing. A quick nod to Jack, a sharp breath inward, and she turned toward the next bay like she hadn't just been thrown across the room.

But Jack saw it.

The way her posture stiffened with every step.

The tiny winces she thought she was hiding when she twisted or bent just slightly.

She was hurt. And being stubborn about it.

Jack wiped his hands on his scrub pants, already moving.

He caught up to her by the next curtain and touched her elbow gently, careful not to startle her.

"Dr. Mohan," he said low enough that no one else would hear. "Come with me."

She opened her mouth, probably to argue, but Jack just lifted an eyebrow and tilted his head down the hall in silent insistence. After a second, she sighed — a soft, reluctant surrender — and followed. Jack led her to one of the empty curtained-off beds, tugging the privacy curtain mostly shut behind them. He grabbed a clean ice pack from the portable freezer tucked into the wall and cracked it between his hands until it chilled.

"Hop up," he said, nodding toward the gurney.

Samira hesitated — pride flickering in her expression — but eventually climbed up with a soft, suppressed grunt of discomfort. Jack set the ice pack down on a tray, then glanced at her meaningfully.

"You're gonna have to lift your top a bit," he said, trying for casual, clinical.

Samira gave a dry little laugh. "Buy a girl dinner first, Dr. Abbot."

He huffed out a short, surprised chuckle, but his heart was hammering

behind his ribs. Still, he turned slightly away, giving her a tiny scrap of privacy as she peeled up the hem of her scrub top and undershirt in one go.

"Okay," she said after a moment, voice light but tight with pain.

Jack turned back—

—and immediately forgot how to breathe.

She was wearing a red lace bra — beautiful, bold against her warm brown skin. Not meant to be seen under scrubs. Not meant to be seen *here*. He dragged his gaze up, trying to stay professional, but God, she looked vulnerable sitting there, bruised and quiet and still with that stubborn set to her jaw.

"How bad is it?" Samira asked, her voice softer now, almost cautious.

Jack blinked, snapping himself back into focus.

He cleared his throat, grabbed a clean pair of gloves to busy his hands.

"It's pretty bad," he said honestly, gently ghosting his fingers above the angry, forming bruise along the small of her back. Purple and red already blooming under her skin. "But no swelling that suggests anything fractured. Just gonna hurt like hell for a few days."

He quickly grabbed the ice pack, careful not to let his hands linger too long against her skin.

"This'll help a little," he murmured, pressing the ice gently against the bruised area. Samira sucked in a sharp breath at the cold, knuckles whitening as she gripped the edge of the gurney.

"Sorry," Jack said quietly. "I know it sucks. Just a few minutes, okay? Then I'll grab some meds."

She nodded, her chin dropping to her chest, breathing through it.

Jack watched her, his hands steady, his chest tight.

There was a long, heavy silence between them, filled only by the distant beeping of monitors and the murmur of the ER beyond the curtain. Maybe it was the way she was sitting there, too proud to admit she needed this. Maybe it was the leftover adrenaline still thrumming through him from seeing her hurt. But Jack found himself speaking before he thought better of it.

"So," he said, tone gentler, almost teasing. "What was so awful about the date you had to pray for a hospital emergency to get out of it?"

Samira gave a small, choked laugh — half amusement, half pain.

"You sure you want to know?" she asked without lifting her head.

"I'm already here," Jack said, smiling a little. "Might as well."

Samira let out a long sigh. "A regrettable Tinder date. I barely made it through appetizers."

"This is why I prefer old school dating," Jack pointed out.

She shrugged carefully, flinching a little under the ice. "Nothing wrong with using apps but he was... boring. Like, *bragging-about-his-crypto-portfolio-for-twenty-minutes* boring. And then he told me he didn't really believe in 'emergency medicine' as a specialty. Thought it was 'glorified babysitting.'"

Jack barked out a laugh before he could help it.

Samira smiled, finally looking up at him through tired, amused eyes.

"And when I didn't laugh at his joke about 'nurses being glorified waitresses,' he said I was being 'too sensitive' and asked if I was one of those 'emotional girls who needed therapy.'"

Jack's hands tightened slightly around the ice pack.

"Charming," he muttered darkly.

"Yeah," Samira said dryly. "Real catch."

Jack shook his head, the protective anger curling hot in his gut.

"You deserve better than that," he said simply, quietly.

For a moment, Samira looked at him — really looked at him — and something shifted in the air between them. Softer. Heavier. More dangerous. Jack forced himself to break eye contact first, clearing his throat.

"Alright," he said, pulling the ice pack away carefully. "That's enough icing for now. Let's get you some meds before you try to save the world again."

Samira smiled — small, genuine — and let her shirt fall back down over the bruise. But even as she did, Jack could still feel the heat of her skin on his fingertips, the way she'd looked at him like maybe she *saw* it too. Jack helped Samira down from the gurney with a hand at her elbow, fingers warm and solid through the thin fabric of her sleeve. She moved stiffly, but stubbornly waved him off when he hovered too close.

"I'm fine," she insisted, offering a small, lopsided smile.

Jack didn't believe her for a second. But he knew Samira well enough by now to know that pushing her in public would only make her dig her heels in deeper. So he settled for an exasperated grunt and made a mental note to keep her in his line of sight for the rest of the night as he handed her a couple of ibuprofen tablets.

Hour 3

LEVEL 1 TRAUMA — ETA 3 MINUTES.

Jack cursed under his breath.

They had just been working on some charts for a kid with a FOOSH injury and a mother who needed stitches on her forehead when their pagers went off.

"Stay behind me for this one," he said before he could think better of it, tone low and unmistakably commanding. Samira blinked, a little startled at the shift in him, but then her mouth twitched — that same stubborn tilt — and she nodded once. Jack let out a breath he hadn't realized he'd been holding and pulled his gloves back on. They headed back to the trauma bay, side by side, the heavy tension still humming between them — thicker now, almost visible in the narrow space between their shoulders.

Samira moved slower than usual, and Jack noticed every damn wince she tried to hide.

Every one made something sharp twist inside his chest.

The ambulance doors slammed open a moment later, paramedics rushing in with a middle-aged man — semi-conscious, bleeding heavily from the side of his head. The trauma room burst into motion. Jack immediately stepped in front of Samira without thinking, intercepting the gurney and barking out orders.

He heard Samira shift behind him, setting up airway supplies like she always did, but she was quieter than usual, more careful with her movements.

Jack's focus split — half on the patient, half on the woman behind him he couldn't stop worrying about.

The tension was a living thing now, curling around his spine, clawing at his throat.

At one point, Samira brushed close, handing him a syringe, and Jack's fingers accidentally brushed against hers.

It was the lightest touch — barely there — but it slammed into him harder than any hit he'd ever taken in a trauma room. He looked up — and for a split second, their eyes locked.

And Jack forgot where he was. Forgot everything except how close she was standing, how soft her mouth looked, how warm her skin had been under his hands earlier. Samira swallowed, her throat bobbing. Then she blinked hard and stepped back, forcing the professional wall back up between them.

Jack dragged in a rough breath, trying to do the same.

Focus.

Get through the trauma. Then figure out what the hell to do about the fact that you're two seconds away from doing something really, really stupid.

They worked the patient quickly — stabilizing the bleeding, prepping him for a CT scan. Jack moved on pure muscle memory, half-aware of Samira at his side, hyperaware of the way her breathing hitched slightly whenever she had to reach or bend. When the trauma was finally cleared and the patient was wheeled out to imaging, Jack turned immediately to Samira.

"You need to sit down," he said quietly, stepping in front of her before she could slip away.

"I'm fine," Samira protested — too quickly, too automatically.

Jack tipped his head down, lowering his voice to something just shy of a whisper, the kind of tone that was meant only for her and no one else.

"Samira," he said — her first name, not 'Dr. Mohan,' not tonight — *"I'm not asking."*

For a long second, she just looked at him — wary, stubborn, and something else too, something softer that lived just behind her eyes, tugging at him like gravity. Finally, she nodded. Jack exhaled, the tight knot in his chest easing just a fraction. He reached out — again, without thinking — and placed his hand lightly at the small of her back to guide her toward an empty chair.

She flinched at the touch — not from him, but from the bruise — and Jack immediately dropped his hand, guilt slamming into him. But Samira only gave him a tired, almost shy glance over her shoulder, like she didn't mind nearly as much as she should. Jack sat her down carefully, crouching in front of her so he could look her in the eyes.

"You're not invincible, Samira," he said, voice rough. "You don't have to pretend to be. Especially not with me."

For a second, she looked like she might argue — might put the armor back on and shut him out, "Okay fine, but at least let me help finish some charting and then I'll sit down."

Hour 4

The trauma bay finally settled into a rare moment of calm after the chaos of the first few hours of the night shift. Nurses were busy restocking, and orderlies were moving the patient to the CT scanner.

Jack stepped back from the bustling activity, his eyes drifting to Samira.

She was still sitting, her back against the chair, eyes closed, but her posture still stiff with discomfort as she finished off some charts on the computer. Her fingers were loosely wrapped around the cup of water Jack had handed her earlier, but she wasn't drinking it. She looked drained, like the weight of the night was finally catching up with her. Jack hesitated. The hospital was busy — the ER never stopped — but something told him Samira wasn't going to be much help to anyone else tonight if she didn't rest for a while. He took a slow breath, approaching her once more.

"Samira," he said, softer this time, dropping his usual clinical tone. "I'm going to cover your patients for the next little bit. You need to rest."

Samira opened her eyes at the sound of his voice, looking up at him with that ever-familiar skepticism.

"I'm fine, Dr. Abbot," she started, but Jack cut her off before she could finish.

"No," he said firmly. "You're not. Your back's killing you, and we both know it." His gaze softened, but his voice remained low and insistent. "Sit tight. I've got this. You need a break, Samira. You look like you're in more pain than half the people admitted in this ER."

"That's because most of them are heavily sedated," Samira argued but Jack was having none of it so he said, "Samira, please...and you and I both know if it gets any worse for you, we're going to have to file a large amount of paperwork for an injury report."

She blinked, clearly thrown by the sincerity in his voice. She opened her mouth, probably to argue again, but then sighed, closing her eyes again.

"Fine," she muttered, letting her shoulders slump a little. "But only for a few minutes."

Jack gave her a small smile. "Deal." He gave her shoulder a gentle pat before he turned toward the hallway, leaving her in peace for the first time all night. He checked the boards — saw a couple of consults and minor injuries coming in, nothing too urgent. He could handle it. Hell, if anything, he was secretly relieved to have an excuse to take care of things without constantly worrying about her.

But he found his thoughts drifting back to her again — that damn tension still hanging between them. The way she had looked at him in the trauma room, and how every word they'd exchanged since had felt like more than just routine. He shook it off, focusing instead on filling out the charts for a few patients. When the ER calmed again, he checked in with the nurses and grabbed a quick cup of coffee before heading back to the break area where Samira was still sitting.

She was on her phone, scrolling through something on her screen, but her posture hadn't improved. She still looked exhausted. Jack leaned against the doorframe, watching her for a moment before he spoke. "You sure you're alright?"

Samira glanced up at him, offering a small, tired smile. "Yeah. Just... tired, I guess."

"How's your back?" Jack asked, his voice softer than before, but that edge of concern still there.

She shrugged, clearly trying to downplay it. "Better. The ice helped. Thanks."

"Good," Jack replied, moving to the counter and leaning on it as he looked down at her. "You've been pushing yourself all night. You're lucky you're not hurting more than you are."

"I've had worse," Samira said with a small smirk, but it lacked its usual bite. "It's not the first time I've been thrown around by a patient. Besides, it's only been a few hours."

Jack didn't respond immediately. Instead, he studied her — really studied her — his gaze lingering on the tiredness around her eyes, the way her shoulders were still tense despite the brief rest. He took a few steps closer, his voice quieter now.

"You know you could have turned down coming in right?."

Samira met his gaze, her expression unreadable for a moment. Then she softened, her lips pressing into a tight line.

"Sadly, this place is basically my home. I've got nothing to come home to but a bed," she said, but there was something else there now. Something beneath the words. Jack didn't hesitate this time. He pushed off the counter, closing the space between them. He could see the vulnerability in her eyes now, something she usually kept hidden behind a wall of professionalism.

What hurt most about what she said was that he was in the same boat. He just couldn't imagine someone as vibrant as her was in the "the hospital is my home" void that he's in.

"I'd argue that is an unhealthy relationship with the ER," Jack said quietly, his voice unexpectedly tender. "But I'd be a hypocrite because I find myself in your shoes."

For a long, pregnant pause, Samira just looked at him, something shifting in her gaze. She didn't say anything right away, but the air between them was thick, charged with unspoken words. Finally, she let out a soft sigh, looking down at her hands. "Sometimes... it's just easier to be preoccupied and forget everything else. And being here... it's almost like I have something to do...something to prove, y'know?"

Jack's heart gave a small, sharp tug at the rawness in her voice. "You don't need to prove anything to me, Samira. I know exactly how hard you work. I see you."

Her gaze flicked up to him, catching his eyes — *really* catching them this time. And Jack felt it, too, that shift. The tension between them wasn't just professional anymore. It was personal. It was real. And it was getting harder and harder to ignore. Samira swallowed, her throat working, but she didn't look away. "Thanks, Dr. Abbot," she said softly. "It's just hard sometimes, you know? I don't... I don't want anyone to think I'm weak."

Jack's hand instinctively reached for hers on the table, his fingers brushing the back of her hand lightly. The moment was so small, so gentle, but it felt like a leap.

"Please...just call me Jack and you're not weak," Jack said quietly, his voice almost a whisper. "You're stronger than anyone I know. Do you have any idea how much of a superstar you are during the Pittfest MCI? If I was some stranger and you introduced yourself as an attending, I'd be none the wiser. Don't even get me started on how much Robbie adores you."

Samira laughed at that, "Dr. Robby? Really? I think he's harder on me than most people. I think my pleasant personality bugs him."

Jack shook his head and said as he placed a hand on hers, "It doesn't, and if he rides your ass too hard...you tell me so I can smack him back into the 21st century."

Samira's breath hitched for just a second, her fingers flexing slightly under his touch. But she didn't pull away.

The quiet between them stretched, filled with everything unsaid. The world outside the breakroom seemed to fade away, leaving only the two of them in this tiny, stolen moment. Then, finally, Samira let out a soft, almost laugh-like sigh and gave him a small, genuine smile.

"Maybe you're right, maybe I do have some good qualities," she said quietly. "But I'm still learning."

Jack's lips curled upward, a teasing glint in his eyes.

"Well, I'm glad you haven't given up on this ER yet Samira, we need more doctors like you here," he said, his tone warm, with just a hint of a challenge. Samira's smile widened slightly, and for the first time that night, the weight seemed to lift a little from her shoulders. She tried to stand, but Jack could see the moment she shifted her weight — the brief wince that crossed her face before she masked it with a practiced smile. She was still trying to downplay it, still trying to push through the pain, but it was clear to him that she was hurting.

Jack took a step closer, his voice gentle but firm. "Samira, stop. You're not fine." He reached out, his hand brushing her arm as if to steady her. "I'm not going to let you keep pushing yourself when you're in pain."

She gave him a look, but there was no fire behind it. Just a quiet weariness that made Jack's chest tighten. Samira didn't protest this time — instead, she let out a small sigh and gave a slight nod.

"Fine," she muttered, the fight draining from her voice. "But just a few minutes, Jack. Seriously."

"Okay good, but why do you insist on trying so much when you're pushing your limits?", Jack asked.

For a long moment, she didn't answer. The silence stretched, thick with something Jack couldn't quite name. When she did speak, her voice was quieter than before, raw in a way that made Jack feel like he'd been let in on something he wasn't supposed to hear.

"It's something McKay said after the Pittfest MCI," she murmured, her voice distant now, as if remembering the conversation vividly. "She told me that this job can't be my whole life. That we need to find balance outside of this place, because we can't just live in trauma and chaos all the time."

Jack's brow furrowed at the mention of McKay's advice. He could understand the sentiment — hell, he'd tried to figure out how to make life outside of work work for years, but hearing it from Samira felt different. She was usually so *in control*, so *focused* — hearing that even she was struggling with it made something inside him twist.

"So what did you do?" Jack asked, his voice soft but full of curiosity.

Samira let out a humorless laugh, her hands trembling slightly as she folded them together. "I went on a date, which you already know was a disaster," she said, her eyes flickering with the faintest trace of bitterness. "Thought maybe I could find something outside of work,

maybe something normal. A distraction." She leaned back in the chair, her shoulders sagging as if just recalling the memory exhausted her. "But it was a disaster."

Jack's eyes softened, a small sigh escaping him. "Samira, It's okay to have bad days. To not be perfect."

She glanced up at him, her gaze sharp for a moment, before the hardness faded again. "It's not just a bad day, Jack," she said, her voice quieter now, like she was letting her guard down just a little. "It's that... maybe I'm only good at this. At being here. At being *needed*."

The words hung heavy in the air, and Jack couldn't ignore the pain that laced her voice. The vulnerability she was letting slip through, even if she wasn't fully aware of it. He shook his head slowly, his voice earnest and soft. "That's not true. You're so much more than this job, Samira."

Her lips pressed together, her eyes flickering toward the ground. "I don't know what else there is. Every time I try to do something *else*, it ends in disaster. So maybe it's easier if I just stay here. I'm good at this. At being the person everyone calls when things go wrong."

Jack's heart tugged painfully at her words. He leaned in slightly, lowering his voice, trying to make her see what he saw. "That's not all you are. You *are* good at this. But you're so much more than that, Samira. You have a life outside of these walls, even if it feels like it's all falling apart right now. You deserve to have something beyond just being 'needed.'"

Her eyes flickered up to meet his, the guarded walls around her just a little lower than they'd been moments before. There was a softness there, a weariness, and maybe a flicker of hope — or maybe just the

desire to believe him.

Jack took a step back, giving her some space, but his eyes didn't leave hers. "I'm not going to let you believe that your worth is tied to just this place. And I *sure as hell* won't let you keep thinking you can't have something more otherwise you'll be a depressed old man like me."

She blinked a couple of times, and Jack saw the faintest tremor in her lip. For a split second, it felt like she might say something — something big. But instead, she swallowed hard, pushing back the emotions, just a little too quickly.

"You are not a depressed old man Jack," Samira said with a chuckle, "I think you give yourself too little credit."

Jack held her gaze for a beat, watching the way her smile didn't quite reach her eyes. He could see the doubt still lingering there, but he wasn't going to let it slide. She needed to hear this, needed to feel that there was more to her than just the doctor she was here.

He cleared his throat, trying to lighten the air between them just a little. "Samira," he said, his voice gentle but persistent. "What do you like to do when you're not at work?"

Her eyebrows furrowed slightly, and for a moment, he could tell she was surprised by the question. It was the kind of thing most people might ask to fill the silence, but with Samira, it felt different. It felt like she wasn't used to anyone asking her about *her* outside of this place.

"I don't know," she said, shrugging, but there was a softness to her voice now, as if she were contemplating the question more than she'd expected. "I guess... I used to paint a little, when I was younger. Mostly just sketches, nothing serious." She hesitated, clearly unsure

about sharing that part of herself, like it was something long buried. "And I like reading. Fiction mostly. Historical stuff, I guess."

Jack's eyes lit up at her answer, something inside him sparking. He hadn't expected this, especially not the mention of painting. It was so different from the Samira he saw every day — the professional, the focused, the one who never showed cracks.

"That's amazing," he said, the words slipping out before he could stop them. "I didn't know you painted."

She smiled faintly, almost shyly, a small, wistful look crossing her face. "Yeah. I guess I don't really talk about it. It just... it doesn't feel like something I can *do* right now, you know?" Her voice softened, almost like she was talking to herself more than him. "I don't really have the time, or the energy. And honestly, I don't even know if I'm *good* anymore. I stopped when my *Baba* died."

Jack didn't let her dismiss it. He then said firmly, meeting her eyes with an intensity that left no room for argument. "You should paint again. I'm serious. It's part of you."

She blinked, surprised by his certainty. There was a slight shift in her posture, like she hadn't expected him to *really* listen. And for a moment, the world outside seemed to fade again — just the two of them, talking about something that felt real. *Personal*. Samira hesitated, looking down at her hands before meeting his eyes again. "Maybe one day," she said softly, almost too softly. "But right now, I guess I'm still figuring it all out."

Jack didn't push her on it — not yet. He could feel how close she was to letting herself be more than just the version of herself she'd allowed to exist here. But it was going to take time, and he wasn't going to rush her. Not when he saw how tightly she held everything together.

Instead, he changed the subject, trying to lighten the mood. "You know, I think we need to do something to make tonight a little easier. And no, I'm not talking about more ice packs or pain meds."

Samira raised an eyebrow, the familiar spark of curiosity back in her eyes. "Oh? And what did you have in mind, Dr. Abbot?"

Jack grinned. "Maybe some actual food. Like, real food. Not just the hospital's vending machine junk. You up for it?"

Samira chuckled, though it was soft and tired. "You're asking me out for a meal in the breakroom?" she teased.

"I'd take you to a nice place," Jack said, his grin widening as he leaned in slightly, "but we're both on the clock. So, I'll settle for the best we can get right now."

Samira shook her head, her lips curling into a reluctant smile. "You're incorrigible, you know that?"

Jack shrugged, the teasing glint never leaving his eyes. "It's part of my charm."

She gave him an exasperated but affectionate look, then sighed, leaning back a little more in her chair. "You know what? I'm so not in the mood for hospital food, but I'm too tired to argue. If you're serious about it, I'll bite."

Jack's heart lifted at her willingness to go along with it (he might

have to make a pit stop and tell Shen to cover for him and page him immediately if he is needed). It felt like another small step, a crack in the armour she wore so well.

"Deal," Jack said with a playful smirk, then took a step back. "I'll grab us something, and you just sit here and rest for a bit. Seriously. Don't move until I get back."

Samira made a face, but there was warmth in her gaze. "Fine, fine. But I swear to God, Jack, if you bring me a granola bar, you're going to become a patient in this ER."

Jack laughed, already heading for the door. "You got it. No granola bars. Just food."

As he left, he couldn't help but feel a sense of quiet victory. It wasn't just about the small win of getting her to take a break, or the fact that she had opened up a little about something beyond work. It was about the slow, steady realization that Samira wasn't just a colleague to him anymore — she was someone he genuinely cared about. Someone he *wanted* to be there for, no matter how much she tried to hide it.

Jack returned a little while later, carrying a couple of takeaway bags that smelled like something other than hospital cafeteria food — something real. He set them down on the counter in the breakroom, feeling the quiet excitement of having pulled this off. For a second, he wasn't Dr. Abbot, the attending. He was just Jack, trying to do something nice for someone who, for all her strength, deserved a moment of kindness.

"Ta-da!" he announced, his voice a little too enthusiastic for the late hour. "I come bearing actual food."

Samira looked up from where she'd been resting, her eyes a little softer than before. She had propped her legs up on the chair, clearly trying to stay as still as possible, though Jack could still see the occasional wince when she shifted. Her gaze flicked toward the bags with curiosity.

"You actually *did* get something decent," she remarked, raising an eyebrow. "You're full of surprises Jack."

Jack smiled as he set the bags down in front of her. "No granola bars, promise," he said with a mock serious expression, trying to lighten the mood. "Got us a couple of sandwiches and some soup. I thought it'd be more appropriate than trying to offer you a hospital salad."

Samira chuckled, the sound easy and warm, and it made Jack's chest tighten in a way he didn't quite understand. She pulled one of the bags closer, peering inside.

"Alright, alright," she said with a faint smile. "You get some points for this one. It smells decent."

"Decent?" Jack scoffed. "It's gourmet compared to what you usually get around here."

She shot him a teasing look as she pulled out the sandwich. "I'm sure it's a five-star meal. You could have offered to bring me a Michelin star, but I suppose this is the next best thing."

"I'm working on it," Jack teased back, grinning as he sat across from her. He unwrapped his own sandwich and settled back into the chair, trying to keep his attention on the moment — on her — instead of the way his heart was beating a little faster than usual. They ate in comfortable silence for a while, the sound of plastic wrappers and

clinking of spoons filling the air between them. Jack noticed the way Samira relaxed, her posture loosening as she ate, the tension in her face softening with each bite. It was a small victory for him, but it felt important.

"So," Jack said after a while, breaking the silence. "You mentioned painting earlier. Tell me more about that."

Samira blinked, clearly caught off guard by the question. She hesitated, glancing at the sandwich in her hand as if it held the answers.

"I don't know," she said quietly. "It's been a long time. I used to paint a lot, actually. Landscapes mostly. Nothing fancy, just... I liked the way it made me feel. Kind of like I could get lost in it. And it helped me... disconnect, I guess."

Jack leaned forward slightly, his interest piqued. "Why did you stop?"

Samira shrugged, a faint smile tugging at the corner of her mouth. "Life happened, *Baba* died. I guess it didn't seem as important once I got into med school. Then residency hit, and I just... I stopped making time for it." She took a slow, deliberate bite of her sandwich. "And honestly, I'm not sure if I'd even be able to pick it up again, even if I wanted to. There's just so much going on here. It feels selfish, I guess. Taking time for something that isn't saving lives or fixing people."

Jack's heart ached at the way she phrased it. The way she placed everything, every part of herself, second to the needs of others. He could see why it was hard for her to feel like she had permission to live outside of the hospital walls. But the more he heard, the more he wanted to change that. She was allowed to have something else. She deserved it.

"You're not selfish for wanting something for yourself," Jack said, his voice gentle but firm. "Painting, reading, whatever makes you feel good. It's not selfish to want to be whole. You can still be a great doctor and take care of yourself, too."

She met his eyes, and for a moment, he saw a flicker of something — maybe hope, maybe uncertainty, maybe both. Samira didn't respond right away, but the silence between them wasn't heavy. It was thoughtful. The kind of silence that only came when people were starting to understand something new about each other.

Then, as if to shift the mood, she gave him a small, half-smile. "Well, maybe after I get my back in shape, I'll dust off my brushes. But you're going to have to remind me that I'm allowed to have time for it."

"I'll remind you," Jack said with a grin, leaning back in his chair. "I'll even drag you out of here and make you take a real break. Paint something. Whatever you need. Just don't forget to like yourself some times."

Samira's smile widened, a real one this time, and Jack felt a sense of quiet pride that he'd managed to get through to her — even if just a little. She gave a soft sigh and finally leaned back in her chair, her posture still guarded but a little more relaxed. "Thanks, Jack. Although if you keep talking, I might need a hard drink."

Jack laughed at her response and commented, "I think Robby is rubbing off on you too much. I wouldn't be surprised if he admitted that he birthed you."

Samira snorted at that, "Oh please, Dr. Robby and I? Similar? Are you

sure you didn't hit your head on your way back here?"

Jack shrugged, not backing down. "You'll see it one day and I'll say 'I told you so'."

For a long moment, they sat in comfortable silence, finishing their meals. But it wasn't the same silence as before. It wasn't one full of distance or guarded walls.

Hour 5

The emergency room was bustling with activity as usual, but the atmosphere had taken on a sharper edge after the arrival of a new patient. Samira stood at the bedside, her clipboard in hand, going through the initial assessment when she froze for a moment. The man in front of her was slurring his words, his eyes bloodshot from both alcohol and pain, and his disheveled appearance screamed trouble. As the nurses worked to stabilize him, Samira's gaze flickered to his face, a familiar knot forming in her stomach. She'd seen him before. He was the man she'd gone on a date with just a few hours earlier.

At first, she hadn't recognized him in his current state — drunk, injured, and looking like he had a few too many shots to drink — but now, the pieces clicked. The same guy who'd sat across from her in the dimly lit restaurant earlier that evening. The one who had made her dinner miserable. The one who had bragged about his job and demeaned hers in the most annoying way possible. The one who hadn't even noticed when she'd checked her phone for the time, desperate to find an excuse to leave and thankfully she did.

And now, here he was, on a gurney in the ER, having gotten himself hit by a car after driving in his drunken state. Samira felt a small, bitter laugh bubble up in her chest. Of course. Of *course* this would happen. Her failed date would end up back here. She'd been hoping,

at the very least, that it would just be a memory she could laugh about later, but no. The universe had a sense of humor, alright.

"Hey, Samira," the man slurred, his voice thick with alcohol. "You still look as good as I remember. Had a lot of fun tonight, didn't we?"

Samira's jaw tightened, but she forced a smile, doing her best to keep things professional. "I'm here to take care of you," she said, her voice calm. "Let's focus on that, okay?"

The man seemed to ignore her response, his attention clearly elsewhere. "You're still looking fine, though," he mumbled, his eyes a little unfocused as he tried to lean forward. "Maybe next time we can... you know... skip the dinner part and go straight to the fun."

Samira's stomach churned, the polite smile never leaving her lips. She felt the tension coil tighter in her body, but she kept her voice steady. "Please stay still," she said, looking at the nurses who were busy working to set his leg. "We need to get you stabilised."

But he wasn't listening. Instead, he continued to gaze at her, undeterred, his comments slipping into a more misogynistic tone. "You really should lighten up, Samira. Maybe I'll take you out again, show you a good time. I bet you're the kind of girl who needs someone to... you know, handle you. Not so much with the doctor stuff, huh?"

Samira felt her frustration mount, and just as she was about to snap back at him, Jack appeared at her side. He stood there for a second, reading the situation in a single glance, then spoke, his tone sharp.

"Hey, *asshole*," Jack said, his voice low but unmistakably authoritative. "You need to shut your mouth and focus on getting treated."

The patient seemed too far gone to realize the severity of his situation, but the insulting comments didn't stop.

"What, you got a thing for her too, doc?" he sneered at Jack. "She seems a little too uptight for you. Why don't you show her how to loosen up?"

Jack's hand clenched into a fist, but before he could react further, the patient suddenly shifted on the bed and reached out, grabbing Samira by the waist as she stood nearby. The move was aggressive, and Samira immediately pulled away, but the patient's grip was too strong.

"Get your hands off her!" Jack barked, stepping forward, his voice a low growl. "You don't touch her like that. Ever."

The man, still barely aware of his actions, laughed drunkenly. "What? She's just a woman. I don't see the problem."

"Are you kidding me?," Jack snapped, his tone biting. "She's a person, and you're going to respect that."

Samira was already pulling away, but Jack was having none of it. He was standing between her and the patient now, his body tense, ready to escalate if necessary. The patient might have been hurt, but that didn't give him the right to act like a disrespectful jerk.

"Let's get security in here," Jack ordered, his eyes flashing with anger.

Before the situation could escalate further, Samira placed a hand on Jack's arm, her voice steady and calm despite everything. "Jack, it's fine," she said softly. "Everything's under control. Just let them do their jobs."

Jack turned to her, his gaze dark with frustration, but Samira gave him a quiet nod, her professionalism slipping back into place. He took a deep breath, stepping back, but his eyes never left the man. His protective instinct for Samira was still there, but he knew when to take a step back, too.

As security arrived and the situation began to calm down, Samira turned to Jack, offering a small, tired smile.

"Thanks," she said quietly. "I appreciate it."

Jack's lips curved into a small, almost reluctant smile, though his frustration still lingered. "Don't thank me. That guy had it coming. No one gets to treat you like that."

Samira's smile softened, the tension in her shoulders easing. "I'm fine, Jack. Honestly. Just another night in the ER."

Jack raised an eyebrow, giving her a pointed look. "I don't think you should be dealing with this kind of crap at all Samira. Ever."

Her smile faltered just slightly, her gaze drifting to the floor as she gathered her thoughts. "I don't need anyone to protect me, Jack. I've been doing this on my own long enough."

Jack's expression softened, and he took a step closer, his voice low.

"Yeah, I can see that. But that doesn't mean you have to. Not everything has to be a fight on your own, Samira."

For a moment, Samira just stared at him, her expression unreadable. Then, with a quiet sigh, she nodded, her voice barely above a whisper.

"Maybe not," she said. "But it's hard to let go sometimes."

Jack watched her turn away, already reaching for the next chart, already moving forward like nothing had happened. Like that guy's hands hadn't been on her, like Jack hadn't almost lost his temper right there in the middle of the ER.

Something twisted in his chest. It didn't feel right — just letting her walk away like that, pretending everything was fine when it so obviously wasn't. He took a step forward without even thinking about it.

"Samira," he called out, his voice a little rougher than he intended.

She paused, half-turning to look back at him, the overhead fluorescent lights catching the faint sheen of exhaustion in her eyes. She waited, patient but expectant.

Jack opened his mouth, but the words got stuck somewhere between his chest and his throat. What was he even trying to say? *Be careful? Don't pretend you're okay? Let me be by your side?* All of it felt too big, too much for a place like this — too heavy for a moment that was already weighed down by everything they weren't saying. For a long beat, he just stood there, searching for something — anything — to say. But nothing came out.

Samira's smile was soft, understanding, like she knew exactly what

was happening inside him even though he hadn't said a word. She shifted the chart to one hand and gave him a small nod.

"I'll come find you later," she said gently. "When things calm down a little."

Jack still didn't move, didn't speak, didn't trust himself to.

"And you," she added, her voice teasing but warm, "should take a break too. Before you explode at the next drunk idiot who looks at me the wrong way."

He huffed out a short breath that might've been a laugh, or maybe just relief. The knot in his chest loosened a little. He watched as she turned and disappeared down the hall, her gait still a little stiff from the earlier injury, but her shoulders squared like she could carry the weight of the whole damn world if she had to.

Jack ran a hand through his hair, letting out a long breath.

Later. She'd come find him later.

And when she did, maybe, just maybe, he'd find the right words.

Hour 6

The trauma bay doors slammed open with a jarring crash, and the paramedics rushed in, pushing a gurney at full speed. Jack's head snapped up from the chart he hadn't really been reading, and he was moving before anyone even had to call his name.

"Male, twenties, MVC, unrestrained driver," one of the paramedics rattled off as they barreled toward Trauma 2. "Lost pulses twice en route, we got him back with compressions and epi. He's hypotensive, tachycardic, abdomen's rigid. No breath sounds on the left."

Jack caught sight of Samira out of the corner of his eye, already tossing on gloves and snapping into focus. She grabbed a gown as they both fell into step on either side of the gurney.

"On my count," Jack barked. "One, two, three—"

They lifted the patient onto the trauma bed with practiced ease, but it was clear immediately this wasn't going to be straightforward. The guy's skin was pale, almost gray, and his chest barely rose with each shallow, gasping breath.

"Samira, listen," Jack said sharply, already palpating the kid's chest. "No breath sounds on the left, trachea's shifted."

"Tension pneumo," Samira said instantly, nodding.

Jack grabbed for the decompression kit while Samira cut away the rest of the patient's clothes with quick, efficient strokes of trauma shears. Blood pooled underneath the body, seeping from somewhere they hadn't even found yet.

Samira grabbed a 14-gauge needle, finding the second intercostal space mid-clavicular line, and plunged it in — there was a rush of air, but the patient barely improved.

"BP's tanking," the nurse called out. "Seventy systolic!"

"Still hypoxic," Samira muttered, scanning. "Jack, something else is going on."

Jack was already thinking the same thing. Pneumo wouldn't explain all of this — not the rigid abdomen, not the ongoing crash.

"Start bilateral chest tubes," Jack ordered briskly, tossing a quick glance to Samira. "I'll get ultrasound. Something's bleeding, we're missing it."

Samira nodded sharply and pivoted to the left chest, expertly prepping the area while Jack grabbed the portable ultrasound machine and ran the probe over the kid's abdomen. There — free fluid. A lot of it.

"Positive FAST," Jack gritted out. "His belly's full of blood."

"Could be liver, spleen, mesentery—" Samira rattled off, finishing the chest tube placement in record time. Blood poured out of the tube, confirming the pneumo, but it wasn't the main problem.

"Get blood hanging now," Jack snapped at the nurse. "Two units O neg, massive transfusion protocol!"

Samira was already prepping the right side, her hands steady even though the patient was circling the drain right in front of them. Her jaw was tight, a little muscle flexing at the hinge, but her movements were precise. Focused.

They worked in a silent, desperate rhythm — Jack inserting the second chest tube while Samira got large-bore IVs into both arms, shouting for more hands, more fluids, more blood. Still, the kid's

pressure stayed in the gutter. Jack caught Samira's eyes across the chaos, and in that split second, they were perfectly in sync.

"Diagnostic peritoneal lavage?" she offered, almost breathless.

"Do it," Jack confirmed.

They ripped open the kit, working together to slip the catheter into the peritoneal cavity. Blood poured out immediately.

"Hemoperitoneum," Jack said grimly. "Call CT, but we're going fast. He's not gonna buy us much time."

Jack watched as Samira pressed a firm hand on the patient's abdomen, trying to tamponade the worst of it while they wheeled the gurney toward radiology. Her scrubs were stained with blood to the elbows, her hair sticking to her forehead, but she didn't falter once. And Christ, even now — even now when it was life or death, when every second counted — Jack couldn't help but admire her.

The fire in her. The steadiness. The fierce intelligence in her eyes as she put the puzzle pieces together faster than most seasoned attendings he'd worked with. She was hurting — he hadn't forgotten the way she'd winced earlier — but none of it touched the way she moved in the trauma bay. She was *here*. Solid. Fearless. Brilliant. Jack felt something tighten low in his gut — pride, admiration, and something a hell of a lot more dangerous all tangled up together.

As they shoved through the doors toward CT, Jack slowed just a beat to catch her eye again, grounding himself in the sheer force of her will. Samira caught him looking, one eyebrow lifting just slightly in silent question. Jack just shook his head once, the ghost of a smile tugging at his mouth.

"You're incredible," he said lowly, just for her.

Samira's lips curved in the faintest smirk — tired, blood-spattered, but still unmistakably *her*.

"Yeah," she breathed, her voice rough and a little hoarse, "I know."

And then they were running again.

They barely had time to stabilize the first patient for CT before another shout tore through the ER.

"Another incoming! Second victim from the same MVC — male, forties, critical!"

Jack and Samira exchanged a brief, sharp glance — no time to breathe, no time to rest. They pivoted as the next gurney barreled in, sirens still screaming faintly outside. The man on the stretcher was a mess of blood and torn clothes, his face barely recognisable beneath bruises and swelling. His chest rose shallowly, erratically, the monitor already screaming warnings — oxygen saturation plummeting, heart rate a frantic, thready spike. But it wasn't the man that made Samira falter for the barest second.

It was the girl running beside the gurney — maybe fourteen, brown skin smudged with dirt and tears, a shallow cut bleeding sluggishly down one temple. She clutched the side rail with white-knuckled hands, eyes huge and horrified.

She looked like *her*.

Like Samira — a memory she usually kept buried deep — standing helpless in another hospital, years ago, watching everything she knew crumble around her. Samira's body tensed, her breath catching for half a second. Jack noticed — of course he noticed — his hand brushing lightly against her back in a grounding touch. She didn't look at him. She couldn't afford to.

Samira snapped herself back to the present with brutal force, surging forward with Jack as they caught the new patient.

"On three," Jack called out, voice sharp. "One, two, three—"

They moved the man onto the trauma bed. Blood immediately soaked through the sheets.

"Sir, can you hear me?" Samira called, leaning close, her voice firm but calm.

There was no response. Only a low, agonized groan.

"Massive trauma to chest and abdomen," Jack assessed quickly, already palpating. "Absent breath sounds right side. Deformity in pelvis. Hypotensive."

"Get a chest tube tray and a pelvic binder!" Samira ordered crisply, moving toward the airway kit. "He's crashing."

The daughter sobbed from the side of the room. "Please—please help him!"

Jack started to move toward the airway, but Samira was already there, hands working with fierce efficiency.

"I got airway," she said, barely sparing Jack a glance.

He hesitated a second longer — watching her, feeling the subtle tremor under the professional mask she wore — before snapping back into motion. While Jack handled circulation and damage control, Samira slipped the laryngoscope into the patient's mouth, deftly maneuvering despite the blood pooling in the airway.

"He's got facial fractures," she muttered, angling the blade just right. "Suction."

The respiratory tech passed her the Yankauer suction catheter. Samira cleared the blood with steady hands, then visualized the cords.

"I see it," she said. "Tube."

Jack passed her the endotracheal tube without hesitation, and Samira slipped it home with a satisfying glide. The capnography monitor lit up a precious wave.

"Tube's good," she confirmed, taping it down while Jack already had an ultrasound probe on the chest.

"Right lung's collapsed," Jack called. "Hemothorax. Massive."

"Chest tube now," Samira replied, pivoting smoothly to assist.

They worked together in a brutal, seamless rhythm, Jack inserting the chest tube, Samira managing the airway, hanging blood, calling out vitals. Even if he should be calling the shots, he let Samira lead...there was a tinge of desperation in her determination that made her tunnel vision to this case. The need to be in control emanated from her.

The girl's cries faded into the background, a white noise they could not afford to focus on. Still, Samira's heart ached with every desperate sob from the corner of the room. When they finally got the chest tube in, a gush of dark blood poured out — more than a liter immediately.

"Shit," Jack muttered, locking eyes with Samira. "We need the OR, stat."

Samira nodded tightly. She pressed a firm hand to the patient's chest, over the rib fractures, stabilizing him as they prepared for the mad sprint upstairs.

"Page trauma surgery," Jack ordered. "Tell them we're coming up with an unstable thoracoabdominal injury."

Samira moved toward the daughter quickly before they rolled out.

"Hey," she said, crouching slightly, making herself small and steady. "Listen to me. Your dad's hurt bad, but we're doing everything we can. Stay with the nurse, okay? We'll take care of him."

The girl nodded, tears pouring down her face, clutching her own torn sweater like it was armour. For the first time in years, Samira felt the

old, familiar fracture deep in her chest — the sharp split between who she was and who she had to be. Jack touched her elbow again, a silent call back to focus, and Samira straightened, hardening her expression. She caught Jack's gaze briefly — a silent exchange that neither of them dared put into words right now.

Later, maybe. If there was a later.

They rolled the father toward the OR, running, barking orders, chasing life by the threadbare edge.

Hour 7

Samira sat on a rolling stool beside the stretcher, her gloved hands working methodically to close the gash along the girl's forehead. Her movements were steady, gentle, each suture placed with meticulous care, but her chest felt tight — like every heartbeat took a little more effort than the last.

The girl flinched when the needle passed through skin, unfamiliar with the pressure even when there was no pain, but Samira's voice was soft and even.

"You're doing so well," she murmured. "Almost done, sweetheart."

The girl gave a tight, shuddering nod, tears still sliding silently down her cheeks.

Samira was just snipping the last suture when Jack's voice crackled

over the radio clipped to his scrubs.

"Dr. Abbot, OR needs you. Urgent."

Samira's head jerked up, and she caught Jack's face across the room as he pulled the radio closer to his mouth.

"This is Abbot," he answered quickly. "Go ahead."

The voice on the other end didn't bother softening the blow.

"Patient coded again on induction. Massive hemorrhage. We couldn't get control. Time of death—" A short pause. "2 37."

Silence slammed down so hard it felt like all the air was sucked from the trauma bay. Jack's face didn't move, didn't flicker, but Samira saw it — the weight that settled into his shoulders, the subtle clenching of his jaw. She finished bandaging the girl's wound with a calm she didn't feel, then rose to her feet. Jack crossed the bay with slow, heavy steps, stopping a few feet away from her. His voice dropped to a rough whisper.

"Samira." He nodded slightly toward the hallway. "Can I talk to you?"

Samira gave the girl a quick, reassuring squeeze on the hand. "I'll be right back, okay? You're safe here."

The girl nodded, wide-eyed and trusting in a way that made Samira's throat ache. Jack led her down the hall, around the corner, out of

earshot. For a second, they just stood there, both of them breathing heavily like they'd run a marathon.

"He didn't make it," Jack said finally, low and brutal.

Samira closed her eyes for the briefest second, the words slamming into her like a body blow. But when she opened them again, her face was carefully composed.

"Okay," she whispered.

Her voice didn't shake — she wouldn't let it — but Jack saw the way her hands curled into fists at her sides.

"I'll tell her," Samira said, steady and sure, even though she felt like her chest was caving in. "She deserves to hear it from someone who's been with her this whole time."

Jack hesitated, like he wanted to say something but he understood. He always understood. He just gave a tight nod. "I'll be right here."

Samira turned back toward the trauma bay, feeling every step like she was walking into a fire she couldn't put out.

The girl looked up the second she approached, hope flickering so desperately in her eyes it almost broke Samira right then and there. Samira knelt beside her again, eye-level, her bloody, battered scrubs forgotten.

"Sweetheart," she began gently, reaching out to take the girl's trembling hand in both of hers, "I'm so, so sorry."

The girl's breath caught — a small, high whimper — before she even finished the sentence.

"No," the girl said, her voice cracking. "No, no, no—"

Samira felt her own throat burn as the girl dissolved into sobs, shaking so hard the stretcher rattled beneath her.

"This can't be happening," she choked out. "We were just—we were just going out to get a late night snack, and we—we were laughing—"

Samira squeezed her hand tighter, swallowing the lump rising in her own throat.

"I know, sweetheart," she whispered. "I know. I'm so sorry."

The girl curled inward, sobbing so hard she could barely breathe, repeating over and over, "*Baba, Baba, Baba*," like she could somehow call him back. Samira wrapped her arms gently around her, pulling her into a careful hug. The girl clung to her like a lifeline, fists tangling in the front of Samira's bloody gown. And for a moment — for one raw, broken moment — Samira wasn't in the ER anymore.

She was fourteen again, clutching her father's jacket in a sterile waiting room, hearing those same impossible words.

I'm so sorry.

There was nothing more we could do.

Samira closed her eyes against the flood of memory, resting her cheek lightly against the girl's hair. She forced herself to stay still, to stay steady, to be the safe place this girl needed — even if inside she was shattering all over again. Across the bay, Jack leaned silently against the wall, watching, something dark and pained flickering across his face. He didn't move toward them. He didn't interrupt. He just stayed — standing guard — while Samira bore the weight of another girl's worst day.

And when Samira finally, *finally* managed to pull herself together enough to ease the girl into the care of a social worker, she turned back toward Jack — her eyes glassy, her shoulders trembling from the inside out —and quickly walked away, desperate to hide.

Samira pushed through the heavy door of the on-call room, letting it slam shut behind her, the sound echoing too loud in the cramped, dim space. The fluorescent lights overhead buzzed faintly, casting a sterile glow over the narrow bed, the battered lockers, the battered her. She ripped off her gloves with shaking hands, tossed them somewhere blindly, and leaned back against the door, breathing hard, trying to wrestle the sobs clawing up her throat back into submission.

But she couldn't.

The moment the first shuddering breath escaped her, it was over.

Samira slid down the door until she was sitting on the cold tile floor, her arms wrapping tightly around her knees as the dam finally broke. Hot, wrenching sobs tore out of her — too loud, too raw, the kind of crying she hadn't done in years. The kind of crying she never let anyone see. She buried her face in her arms, wishing she could just disappear — wishing she could crawl right out of her skin and away

from the pain ripping through her chest.

She barely heard the door creak open again, or the soft click of it shutting behind him.

But then Jack was there. Dropping to the floor beside her without a word. Not crowding her, not demanding anything — just *there*. For a long moment, Samira couldn't even look at him. But when Jack gently, cautiously, reached out and brushed his fingers along her arm — just a whisper of a touch — she broke all over again.

"I'm fine," she tried to say, tried to lie, but it came out broken and wet and *so obviously false* that it hurt to even hear herself.

"You don't have to be," Jack said softly.

Samira shook her head hard, wiping at her eyes with the heel of her hand, furious at herself for falling apart like this, for letting him see her like this.

"You don't—" She gasped around another sob. "You don't need to be here, Jack."

Jack shifted closer, the heat of his body anchoring her, steadying her even though she hadn't asked for it. He shook his head once, slow and sure.

"I promised Robby," he said, his voice low and steady, like he was speaking a sacred vow. "I promised him I'd look after you."

Samira let out a shaky, disbelieving laugh through her tears, scrubbing her face again.

"What are you now?" she rasped out. "My babysitter?"

Jack gave a soft, wry huff of a laugh, but when he looked at her, his eyes were serious — so serious it made something ache deep inside her.

"No," he said firmly. "Just... someone who cares about you. A lot."

Samira pressed her forehead to her knees, squeezing her eyes shut, willing the trembling in her hands to stop.

But the words kept clawing their way up, demanding to be spoken, demanding to be freed after years of being buried.

"I'm not crying because I'm weak," she said, her voice muffled and cracked. "I'm crying because..."

She lifted her head, meeting Jack's gaze — and the tenderness there almost undid her all over again.

"Because when I was fourteen," she whispered, "I lost my dad too."

Jack's face softened, his breath catching quietly. He didn't speak. He just waited, giving her the space she needed, the permission to keep going.

"It was a hit-and-run," Samira said, her voice hollow and faraway, like she was telling a story about someone else. "He was picking me up

from school. It was raining, and he—" Her mouth twisted, the memory cutting sharper than any scalpel. "He pulled over across the street, and I ran out. I waved at him... I waved..." Her voice broke. She pressed a shaking hand to her mouth for a moment, fighting for control.

"And this car just—" She sucked in a shuddering breath. "It came out of nowhere. Hit him right in front of me. Threw him thirty feet."

Jack closed his eyes briefly, as if he could absorb some of the pain for her.

"They said he was alive for a while," she whispered. "Said he was awake. Scared. In pain. But by the time the ambulance got there..." She shook her head. "There was nothing they could do."

The tears ran freely now, hot and merciless, but Samira didn't try to stop them anymore.

"I sat in that ER," she said. "Covered in his blood. Listening to some tired doctor tell me how sorry they were." Her lips twisted into a bitter smile. "And I swore — I swore I'd never let anyone else sit there alone like that. I swore I'd be the one on the other side of it someday. Trying to make a difference."

Jack reached out then, threading his fingers gently through hers, grounding her.

"You *have* made a difference," he said, fierce and quiet. "Every damn day. Especially tonight."

Samira let out a broken, exhausted laugh, squeezing his hand like it

was the only thing tethering her to the world.

"It just... it never really goes away," she said, almost apologetically. "No matter how many years pass. No matter how many patients you save."

Jack shifted closer, until their knees were bumping, until there was no space left between them, only warmth.

"I know," he said, his voice rough. "Some losses just... carve themselves into you."

Samira turned her face toward him, tears still shining in her lashes.

"How do you live with it?" she whispered.

Jack gave a small, crooked smile — the kind of smile that said he knew exactly what she meant, even if he didn't have all the answers.

"You don't," he said. "You just... find people who make it hurt a little less."

Samira stared at him, her heart hammering painfully against her ribs. And for the first time in a long, long time, she let someone else shoulder a little bit of the weight. She leaned into him — not much, just enough to rest her head lightly against his shoulder. Jack let out a slow, careful breath, and then he wrapped an arm around her, tucking her in against him like it was the most natural thing in the world.

They sat there on the cold floor of the on-call room — broken and bloodstained and exhausted — holding onto each other in the quiet, shattered aftermath. For a long time, Samira just sat there against him, listening to the steady rhythm of Jack's breathing, the way his chest rose and fell beneath her cheek. The world outside the on-call room — the pain, the grief, the unbearable weight of it all — seemed to soften around the edges, blurring into something distant and almost bearable.

Eventually, she lifted her head — just a little — just enough to shift and glance up at him.

And that's when she caught it.

Jack was already looking at her.

Had been the whole time.

His eyes were dark, shadowed with exhaustion and something deeper — something raw and unguarded that hit her right in the center of her chest. Up close, she noticed details she hadn't really let herself linger on before: the way the faint lines bracketed his eyes, deepened when he smiled — not that he was smiling now. How the streaks of silver threaded through his hair, right at the temples, gave him a kind of effortless, rugged charm that no amount of youth could replicate. How his mouth — firm and usually set into a no-nonsense line — had softened now, just slightly, like he was seeing something he didn't quite know what to do with.

Samira's heart gave a stupid, reckless little stutter in her chest.

Maybe it was the adrenaline still bleeding off, maybe it was the rawness of the night, but suddenly it felt like the space between them

had changed — grown smaller, heavier, thick with something they weren't saying.

She tilted her head a little, giving a tired, watery laugh, trying to cut through the tension before it swallowed her whole.

"You know," she murmured, voice low and a little rough from crying, "I wish I'd been on a date with you instead of that crypto douchebag."

Jack's eyebrows flicked up, surprise flashing across his face before something warmer — something almost disbelievably fond — melted into his features.

Samira gave a tiny, crooked smile, her throat still raw but her heart beating faster now for entirely different reasons.

"Seriously," she said, nudging him lightly with her shoulder. "Any woman would be lucky to have you."

Jack huffed out a soft laugh, but he didn't look away from her. If anything, his gaze sharpened, pinned her there like he was seeing straight through her.

"You're just saying that because you're exhausted," he said, but his voice was quiet, almost hoarse.

Samira shook her head slowly, eyes still locked with his.

"No," she whispered. "I'm saying it because it's true."

The words hung there between them — charged, dangerous, undeniable. Neither of them moved at first. The air between them felt electric, humming with everything they hadn't said, everything they'd been pushing down for months beneath professionalism and trauma and stubborn self-preservation. Jack's hand, still resting lightly on her arm, tightened just a fraction — not enough to hurt, just enough that she could feel the deliberate choice in it.

His gaze dropped to her mouth, flickering there for a heartbeat that stretched out long and trembling.

And Samira — God help her — she tilted her chin up, just slightly, just enough to close that last, unbearable inch between them.

It would be so easy, she thought, dizzy with it.

So easy to lean in.

To forget everything outside this small, aching moment.

Jack's breath caught — she *heard* it — and his hand skimmed up her arm to her face, knuckles brushing her cheekbone so gently it made her shiver.

He was going to kiss her.

She was sure of it.

She wanted him to.

And then —

Their pagers went off.

BEEP-BEEP. BEEP-BEEP.

The shrill, intrusive sound shattered the moment like glass hitting concrete. Samira jerked back, gasping, blinking like she was waking from a dream. Jack swore under his breath, low and harsh, dragging a hand through his hair as if trying to shake off the gravity still pulling between them.

They both fumbled for their pagers, hands clumsy.

CODE BLUE.

Samira sucked in a shaky breath, forcing her heart to slow, to focus, to shove all the messy, electric emotions clawing at her into a locked box she could deal with later. Maybe. If she dared. Jack was already getting to his feet, reaching a hand down to her without hesitation. Samira hesitated only a second before taking it — feeling the solid, reassuring strength of his grip — letting him haul her up.

For a second, they just stood there, too close, hearts hammering too fast, breaths coming too shallow.

Jack's thumb brushed lightly, barely intentionally, over the back of her hand before he let go.

"Later," he said quietly, promising nothing but saying everything.

Samira nodded, her throat too tight to answer, and then they were moving — running — back toward the chaos.

03:00-07:00

Hour 8

The doors of the trauma bay slammed open with a crash loud enough to make the room jolt. Jack and Samira sprinted in side by side, their pagers still vibrating against their hips, their blood already thrumming with urgency.

A young man, no older than thirty, stumbled inside cradling a newborn wrapped in a blood-speckled blanket, sobbing, incoherent.

"My wife—please—help her—she just had the baby—please!"

On the gurney behind him was a woman — pale, almost translucent — chest still under half-hearted compressions from the EMT, her hospital bracelet from a maternity ward still tight around her wrist.

"Ten days postpartum," the medic shouted as they wheeled her in. "Collapsed at home, pulseless on arrival. Massive vaginal bleeding noted at the scene. Estimated downtime twelve minutes!"

Jack didn't hesitate — he barked orders as he moved, his voice cutting through the chaos.

"Samira, airway! Let's move, people, move!"

Samira was already grabbing gloves, snapping them on as she bolted to the head of the bed. Her hands were steady, but inside, her heart ached — the newborn's tiny cries slicing through the trauma bay like knives. The young husband was standing frozen near the wall,

clutching the baby to his chest like the world was ending. Samira forced herself to shove it aside. Focus. Save her.

She swept the airway, voice crisp and clear. "Vocal cords visualised!"

Tube in. Bagging. Oxygen flowing.

"Still pulseless," the nurse called.

Jack was at the foot of the bed, blood soaking his gown as he applied pressure over the woman's abdomen. His hands were stained red, his jaw tight with barely contained fury at the situation. He met Samira's eyes once — a flash of connection — and she knew exactly what he was thinking.

This woman was supposed to be starting her life, not dying in front of them.

"Likely postpartum hemorrhage," Jack muttered, mostly to her. "Uterine atony or retained products."

Samira nodded, already moving to start blood products, her mind racing.

"Massive transfusion protocol activated!" she barked at the nurse, adrenaline pounding.

Jack climbed onto the gurney without hesitation, straddling the patient, delivering high-quality chest compressions himself when no one else could generate enough force. His muscles flexed with each

downward thrust, his scrubs stretched tight across his back, but Samira could barely process it — her focus narrowed to the woman gasping on the edge of death beneath them.

"Samira," Jack said, his voice low but cutting through the noise, "we need a Bakri balloon. Now."

She nodded, rushing to grab the device — a balloon they could insert into the uterus and inflate to tamponade the bleeding. Her hands moved automatically, prepping the sterile field even as her brain screamed *too much blood, too much blood, she's slipping*. Jack kept compressing, his forehead beaded with sweat, his body tense with effort.

"Come on, come on," he muttered under his breath. "Don't you dare leave that baby."

Samira returned, sliding the balloon into position, inflating carefully, watching the monitors for any change. Still flatline. Still nothing. Jack's hands stilled. His head dropped, chest heaving. But Samira wasn't ready to quit.

"Again," she snapped. "We go again."

Jack looked at her, something fierce lighting behind his eyes — admiration, maybe something deeper — and without a word, he went back to compressions. They shocked her twice more. Epinephrine. Blood. Cries echoing. The newborn's wailing was a razor slicing Samira open from the inside out.

And then — a flicker.

A blip.

A beat.

Jack's voice was a rough rasp. "We got a pulse."

The room froze for a beat, and then the nurses sprang into action around them, stabilising lines, prepping for OR. Jack slid down from the gurney, blood splattered, exhausted, his hands shaking slightly. Samira barely heard the congratulations around them. Her heart was hammering against her ribs, her entire body vibrating with adrenaline and something else — something deeper, thicker — a chord strung too tight between her and Jack.

She finally looked up.

And found him already looking at her.

Up close, she could see how gray his temples had gone under the harsh lights, the salt blending into the pepper of his thick hair. There was blood smudged across his jaw, sweat dripping down his neck. His chest heaved with every breath. God, he was beautiful in a way that broke something in her. Solid. Steady. Fierce.

The trauma team buzzed around them, a hurricane of activity — setting up for transport to the OR, documenting every second of the resuscitation. But Samira barely registered it. Her gaze shifted past Jack, locking onto the young husband still crumpled against the wall, clutching the newborn so tightly it looked like he might shatter them both. The baby's cries were desperate, shrill — a sound of pure need.

Samira's heart twisted painfully.

Without thinking, she stripped off her bloodied gloves and gown, tossing them in the bin as she approached him, hands up, voice low and gentle.

"Hey," she murmured. "Hey, you're okay. Can I help you with her?"

The man blinked at her, dazed, tears streaming down his face, barely able to nod.

Samira stepped closer, hands steady, her voice the softest thing in the chaos. "I've got her. You're not alone, okay? I promise."

Carefully, she slipped the newborn from his arms. The little girl — just a tiny thing, barely bigger than a loaf of bread — squirmed and wailed, her fists balled up in fury at the world. Samira cradled her close, instinct taking over without hesitation. She rocked gently from side to side, humming under her breath, the way her mother had once done for her. The baby rooted against her scrubs, her cries softening into hiccupping whimpers almost immediately.

"There we go, sweetheart," Samira whispered, adjusting her hold, one hand supporting the baby's fragile neck with infinite tenderness. "You're safe. You're okay."

Jack who had walked over to talk to the husband had stumbled in his explanation— pausing mid-sentence as his eyes found Samira. And for a moment, he forgot how to breathe. She was radiant. No, *she was devastating* — standing there in the harsh fluorescent light, blood still smeared on her scrubs, her hair wild around her face, cradling that newborn like she was made for it.

Samira had always been fierce — he knew that. Brilliant, sharp, unflinching in the face of pain. But this... this softness, this tenderness, this fierce *love* pouring out of her — it was a different kind of strength. One that hit Jack square in the chest, knocking the air right out of him. He swallowed thickly, forcing himself back to the present.

He turned back to the husband, keeping his voice calm but firm. "We're taking your wife to the operating room now. She's critical, but we got her heart beating again. The OB team is waiting upstairs. We're going to do everything we can to stop the bleeding."

The husband just nodded, numb, hands twitching uselessly at his sides.

Samira caught Jack's eye across the room, a silent conversation passing between them.

I've got him.

I know.

You're incredible.

She didn't need words to hear it.

The newborn made a soft, mewling sound, burrowing closer against Samira's chest. Samira instinctively adjusted, tucking the blanket tighter, murmuring to the baby in a mix of English and soft Tamil, the sounds low and soothing.

Jack couldn't look away.

Jesus, Samira.

It hit him like a sucker punch — this image of her, natural and breathtaking, and for one insane second, he let himself imagine it. Her holding a baby that was theirs. Her laughing with him after a sleepless night. Her fierce, boundless love spilling over onto a life they'd made together. Jack forced himself to blink, to breathe, to stay anchored in the moment. This wasn't about him. This was about saving a family.

But when the transport team rushed in, and Samira reluctantly passed the newborn back to a nurse, Jack saw the tiny flash of grief cross her face before she masked it away. He knew, in that moment, with a bone-deep certainty — Samira wasn't just good at this. She was *meant* for it. And he wanted — *God, he wanted* — to be someone who got to be part of that future with her.

As the gurney rolled out toward the OR and the young father took back his baby and stumbled after it, Samira stayed behind, shoulders sagging with exhaustion. Jack drifted closer, every instinct in him pulling toward her.

"You were amazing," he said, voice rough.

Samira shrugged, but her eyes were glassy, full of too many emotions to name. "She's just so little," she whispered. "She doesn't even know... she doesn't even know how close she came to losing her mom tonight."

Jack's heart twisted.

Without thinking, he reached out — his hand brushing her wrist,

grounding her.

"You did amazing," he said, low and sure. "Don't forget that."

For a second, she just looked at him, breathing shallowly. And there it was again — that electric tension between them, burning low and steady under their skin. Samira licked her lips, glancing up at him through her lashes. "You keep looking at me like that, Jack, and I'm gonna start thinking you actually like me."

Jack's mouth curved into the faintest, softest smile. "Samira," he said, voice dropping into something dark and intimate, "you have no idea."

For one breathless moment, the world narrowed to just them.

No blood.

No chaos.

No screaming pagers.

Just Jack. Just Samira. Just the gravity pulling them closer. Then — a nurse poked her head in, calling for Jack. Something about a patient in Resus Two.

The moment shattered.

Samira laughed shakily, rubbing the back of her hand across her mouth.

Jack hesitated for half a second — long enough to make her chest ache — and then he squeezed her wrist gently before stepping away. But as he left, he glanced back once, his gaze lingering.

Later.

Samira pressed a hand to her chest, feeling her heart hammering against her ribs, and knew — whatever was happening between them — it wasn't over.

Not even close.

Hour 9

The adrenaline of the last trauma had faded into a kind of exhausted, vibrating stillness. The ER hummed with low conversation, the click-clack of keyboards, the steady beep of monitors. Nurses bustled past with meds and charts, patients groaned behind curtains, and the scent of industrial coffee and antiseptic hung heavy in the air.

Samira was perched at one of the workstations, her scrub top rumpled, dark strands of hair falling loose from her messy bun. Her eyes were laser-focused on the computer screen as she typed up her trauma note, her fingers flying, her brow furrowed in concentration. Across from her, Jack Abbott sat at his own terminal — or at least, *pretended* to. His fingers hovered above the keyboard, unmoving. His screen was still blank. Instead, his gaze kept drifting — again and again — over the top of his monitor to Samira.

He didn't even try to hide it.

He watched the way she bit the inside of her cheek when she thought too hard, the way her nose crinkled slightly as she scrolled through the chart. He watched the way her body moved — efficient, strong, and somehow still so soft it made something ache deep in his chest.

Christ, he was *gone*.

"You know," came a dry voice beside him, "if you stare any harder, you're gonna burn a hole through her."

Jack startled, whipping his head to the side to see John Shen — one of the newly appointed attendings who used to be a clueless resident stumbling after him and Robby — standing there, sipping casually from a giant Dunkin' Donuts iced latte, his eyebrows raised in open amusement. Jack cleared his throat, leaning back in his chair like he could somehow play it cool. "Not staring."

"Right," Shen said, taking another obnoxiously loud slurp of his coffee. "Just monitoring. For...professional reasons."

Jack glared at him. "Screw you, Shen."

Shen just grinned, teeth flashing. "Dude. You're not exactly being subtle."

Jack rubbed a hand over his jaw, feeling the rasp of stubble, his face heating despite himself. "Shut up."

But Shen wasn't about to let it go. He leaned one elbow on the

counter, lowering his voice conspiratorially. "Look, no judgment. Samira's hot. Way out of your league, but hot."

Jack shot him a *look*.

Shen laughed, bumping Jack's shoulder with his own. "Kidding. Mostly." He sipped again. "Seriously though — you should just ask her out. Before someone else does."

Jack shook his head, forcing his attention back to his screen, pretending to read a lab result he definitely wasn't processing.

"It's complicated," he muttered.

Shen snorted. "Yeah, you're complicated. She's sunshine and knives. She could probably break you in half if you broke her heart. Honestly, I'd pay to see that."

Jack's mouth twisted in a reluctant grin. "Thanks for the support."

"Anytime, Romeo."

Jack shook his head again, pretending to focus, but Shen just leaned in closer, looking far too pleased with himself.

"And just so you know," Shen said casually, tapping his giant iced coffee against the counter, "you're not the only one with eyes on her."

Jack frowned, not bothering to hide his suspicion this time. "What are you talking about?"

Shen grinned like a kid about to set off fireworks. "Dana told me."

Jack blinked. "Dana Evans?"

"The one and only," Shen said, sipping smugly at his drink. "Knows *everything* that goes on around here. Seriously, the woman's like a living, breathing gossip blog."

Jack narrowed his eyes. "And she just... volunteered this information?"

Shen shrugged, completely unapologetic. "Maybe I asked. Maybe she saw you making heart eyes across the nurses' station and felt inspired."

Jack let out a rough breath, scrubbing a hand down his face. "Did she tell you just to torture me?"

Shen's smirk grew. "Maybe. Probably." Another sip. "Definitely."

Jack glared at him, but Shen plowed on, clearly enjoying himself too much to stop now.

"Apparently," Shen said, dropping his voice conspiratorially, "there's a few people who've got a thing for Samira. Couple of the new surgical interns — you know, the ones who still think scalpels make them gods — and one of the ortho residents, Tomás. Plus one of the transporters. And," he added, grinning, "maybe even that cute new RT tech who

blushes every time Samira says hi."

Jack's hands tightened into fists in his lap before he could stop himself.

It was stupid — *he* knew it was stupid — but the thought of Samira smiling that easy, luminous smile at some cocky ortho resident or bashful RT tech made something twist hot and ugly in his gut.

"So yeah," Shen said breezily, watching Jack out of the corner of his eye. "Might want to step it up, Abbott. Competition's looking fierce."

Jack didn't say anything for a long moment, forcing himself to focus on the blinking cursor on his still-empty chart. Across the room, Samira laughed at something one of the nurses said, her head thrown back, her whole face lighting up, and Jack felt that same deep ache tug at him again — a pull so strong he wasn't sure how much longer he could pretend it wasn't there.

"Shut up, Shen," he muttered, but there was no heat behind it.

Shen just grinned wider, raising his cup in a mock toast. "Tick tock, my man."

Jack swallowed hard and finally turned back to his computer, typing at random, trying not to look — but failing miserably — when Samira's soft laughter floated across the bay again, sliding right under his skin.

God help him, he was already in way too deep.

Across from him, Samira shifted — reaching for a pen — and caught him looking again. Her lips quirked into a small, knowing smile. Not mocking. Not dismissive. *Inviting*.

Jack's heart skipped a goddamn beat.

Samira turned her attention back to her chart, but now there was a slight sway to her shoulders, a warmth that hadn't been there before. A silent, *I see you*.

Jack leaned back in his chair, a slow, helpless grin spreading across his face.

Maybe Shen wasn't entirely wrong.

Maybe it was complicated.

But maybe it was worth it.

Jack's fingers hovered over his keyboard, the dull click-clack of typing surrounding him like a veil of normalcy he couldn't quite find his way through. His mind was scattered, the conversation with Shen still buzzing in his ears, the jealousy he couldn't shake gnawing at him from the inside out. He glanced up at Samira again, his chest tightening involuntarily as she leaned in to talk to a nurse, her profile illuminated by the harsh overhead light. She was so focused, so steady in her element, and that small, sharp smile she gave as she listened to the nurse's report only deepened the ache in his chest. He wanted to say something, anything. He wanted to finally have the courage to cross that line between colleagues and... something more.

This time, he would do it.

Jack stood abruptly, a surge of adrenaline coursing through him, as if this moment would be the one that could change everything.

"Samira," he began, moving toward her, his voice low but clear enough to cut through the ambient noise of the ER. She turned at the sound of her name, but before she could fully meet his eyes, a voice interrupted them from behind her.

"Dr. Mohan! Excuse me!"

Samira looked over her shoulder, her expression immediately softening as she caught sight of the patient sitting on the edge of his bed

A frail, elderly man, his face pinched with pain, held up a trembling hand. "I—I'm feeling dizzy. I need help."

Jack's stomach dropped, but he bit back his frustration, forcing his focus back to the situation at hand. He could see the way Samira's posture shifted — her entire body subtly aligning to meet this new need with the grace and expertise that only she seemed capable of.

"Of course, I'll be right there," Samira said, her voice gentle and reassuring. She turned her attention fully to the man, but then, as if she could sense Jack's lingering presence, she glanced over her shoulder at him once more.

"I'll catch up with you in a minute, okay?" she said, her voice softer now, as if she'd recognised his attempt to speak, but the moment had

already slipped away.

Jack stood frozen for a heartbeat, watching her walk away, her figure slipping into the busy flow of the ER like she always did, slipping out of his reach. He clenched his jaw. Damn it. Shen had been right, in a way. He wasn't subtle. But now wasn't the right moment, was it?

Hour 10

The hours dragged on, each minute blending into the next, the constant hum of the ER almost enough to lull Jack into a stupor. It was the tenth hour of his shift, and his body felt like it was made of lead, each step heavier than the last. But as he looked across the room at Samira, he couldn't seem to pull his eyes away from her. She was bent over her computer, typing furiously, her back hunched just slightly in that way that told Jack her injury was still bothering her. He'd been noticing it all day — the way she winced when she moved, how her posture shifted as if she was trying to avoid the pain. She hid it well, but Jack could see through the mask.

And damn it, it was driving him crazy.

His own body screamed for a break, but there was something about seeing her that made his exhaustion feel secondary. He caught himself again, staring. The urge to help her, to make sure she was okay, gnawed at him.

Finally, he couldn't stand it anymore. He crossed the room, moving toward her with purpose.

"Samira," he said, his voice steady but laced with concern.

She looked up at him, blinking as if pulled from a fog. "Yeah?"

"You're still hurting," he stated plainly, his gaze dropping to her back as she adjusted herself in the chair. "You need a break."

Samira straightened, her eyes narrowing. "I'm fine, Jack. I can handle it. I think the Ibuprofen just needs to kick in."

But Jack wasn't buying it. He could see the way she flinched when she shifted her weight. "No, you're not fine," he insisted. "You're barely holding it together. You need a break, and you're taking one. Now."

Samira opened her mouth to argue, but she sighed instead, rubbing the back of her neck. "Okay, okay. I'm not going to win this, am I?"

"Nope." Jack grinned, though there was something softer underneath. He reached over to grab an ice pack from the freezer. "Come on. Break room. Five minutes. Ice, quiet, and no patient drama. You deserve it."

She raised an eyebrow. "Five minutes, huh? You know what they say about ER doctors. Always ready to cut things short."

Jack winked at her, a playful glint in his eyes. "I'm not talking about cutting things short, Samira," he said, his voice low, his gaze flickering to her lips for just a second before he snapped back to her eyes. "I'm talking about getting you to rest. You're no good to anyone if you're working through the pain."

She chuckled, though it didn't quite reach her eyes. "And you're such a saint, huh?"

"You know it." Jack grinned, clearly pleased with himself. "Now, let's get you some relief."

Samira rolled her eyes but let him guide her toward the break room. The tension between them had shifted again, thickening in the air around them, palpable in the way their shoulders brushed when they moved in tandem. They walked into the small break room, a cramped, quiet space filled with mismatched chairs and half-empty coffee cups.

Jack stepped to the freezer, pulling out an ice pack and tossing it to her. "Here," he said, his voice quiet but firm. "Sit down. Let me check on you."

Samira hesitated for a moment, clearly unsure whether to trust him to handle this or to keep soldiering through herself. But then she sighed and dropped onto the small bench along the wall, clearly too tired to argue anymore.

Jack's eyes flickered over her — the way she winced again as she settled, the way she pushed her shirt up to press the ice pack against her lower back. And just like that, a flash of red lace caught his attention. His breath hitched in his chest, his pulse quickening.

He forgot she's still wearing a red lace bra. His eyes locked on the fabric for a beat too long, and he could feel heat spreading across his face. But Samira, as usual, wasn't fazed. She caught his gaze and smirked, completely aware of the effect she was having on him. "What, Jack?" she teased, her voice light but carrying a certain edge. "You don't like the view? It's just a bra, you know."

The way she said it, so casually, made the tension between them sizzle. Jack's mouth went dry, and he cleared his throat. "It's not the view," he said, his voice a little rougher than he'd intended. "It's... you. You're making it hard to focus."

Samira's grin widened. "Oh? Am I now?" Her tone was playful, but

there was something deeper there — something that made Jack's stomach tighten in response.

He forced himself to look away, his eyes darting to the wall as if that might distract him. "You need to stop doing that," he muttered, half to himself. "You're distracting me when I'm trying to be a good guy and help you out."

Samira chuckled under her breath. "Good guy, huh? Is that what you're calling yourself these days?"

Jack turned to face her, his eyes narrowing, the corner of his mouth twitching into a smile. "I'm the best damn guy you'll find, Samira," he shot back. "And you're lucky I'm even offering to help you with your back."

Samira leaned back against the wall, letting out a small sigh of relief as the ice pack worked its magic. "I'm lucky, huh? Or maybe you're just trying to win some points with me."

"Maybe both," Jack replied, his voice turning low and dangerous. "You'll never know unless you let me keep helping you."

The room seemed to shrink, the air around them crackling with tension. The playful banter was there, but it felt like a veil for something else — something heavier, more charged. Jack's mind raced, his body caught between the desire to hold back and the overwhelming pull to cross that line. Samira's eyes softened slightly, the teasing glint fading for just a moment. "Maybe I will," she said quietly, her voice barely above a whisper.

The tension in the air thickened, both of them standing there, the space between them buzzing with unspoken words. Jack's heart was

pounding, his mind racing to process everything that had just happened — the teasing, the quiet moments, the undeniable chemistry. He was struggling to keep it together, but Samira's next words sent everything spiralling out of control.

"Too bad," she said, her voice low and bold, her lips curving into a smirk that made Jack's breath catch in his chest. "I'd rather have gotten sore from being bent over... than from the way I bruised my back."

Jack froze, his entire body going rigid. The words hit him like a punch to the gut, and for a split second, he couldn't move, couldn't think. All he could do was stare at her. His mouth went dry. Every muscle in his body locked, the air in the room suddenly feeling too thick, too hot. His eyes flickered down to her, then back up to her face, where she was watching him with that same infuriating, knowing smile.

Jesus Christ, Samira.

He opened his mouth to respond, but no words came out. His brain short-circuited. What the hell was he supposed to say to that? To *her*? Samira leaned back against the wall, the ice pack still pressed against her lower back, but her gaze was fixed on him, intense and unrelenting. She didn't back down, didn't shy away from the awkwardness she'd just created. No, she was practically daring him to react.

Jack exhaled sharply, as if trying to find the air in his lungs again, but his thoughts were a chaotic mess, spinning in all directions. His mind kept looping over her words, replaying them in his head like a broken record, each repetition making his pulse spike.

"God, you're... impossible," he muttered, finally finding his voice, though it came out a little raspier than he'd intended. He raked a hand

through his hair, trying to steady himself.

Samira raised an eyebrow, clearly enjoying the effect she was having on him. "What? Was that too much for you, Jack?" she teased, her tone light, but there was something behind it — something that told him she wasn't just messing around. She knew exactly what she was doing.

Jack took a step toward her, his movements tense, almost as if he were trying to hold himself back from doing something impulsive. His eyes flickered to her lips before quickly darting back up to her eyes. "You don't play fair," he growled.

She didn't back down. Instead, she took a small step closer, lowering her voice, making the distance between them feel even smaller. "You're the one who's always so serious, Jack. Maybe you need someone who can make you loosen up a little." Her gaze dropped for just a second, and Jack's mind immediately went to dangerous places — places he wasn't ready to explore yet.

His throat tightened, and the words slipped out before he could stop them. "Maybe I do," he said, his voice low, thick with something neither of them were ready to name. "But I'm not sure I can trust you to make it easy on me."

For a brief moment, it felt like time stood still. Samira's smirk softened, and for just a flicker of a second, something passed between them — something deeper than just the teasing, something charged with an intensity neither of them could deny. The playful edge to her expression disappeared, and for once, her eyes weren't filled with mischief, but with something... else.

"Trust me, Jack," she said quietly, her voice quieter now, almost serious. "I make everything easy."

The words landed like a challenge, a dare, and Jack felt himself teetering on the edge of something he wasn't sure he could pull back from. His heartbeat was a drum in his chest, and for the first time in a long time, he wasn't sure whether he was in control or if Samira was.

He opened his mouth to respond, but the distant sound of a pager beeped, cutting through the thick silence that had descended upon them. The moment shattered.

Samira straightened, breaking their stare first, and Jack exhaled sharply, feeling like he'd just narrowly avoided making a huge mistake.

"Guess that's my cue," Samira said, her tone returning to something lighter, almost as if nothing had happened. She grabbed the ice pack, standing up with a sigh, and Jack followed suit, trying to regain some semblance of normalcy. But deep down, he knew that nothing about this was normal anymore.

"Yeah," Jack said, his voice hoarse.

They both turned toward the door, but Jack couldn't shake the heat of the moment, the way her words had made everything inside him spin. It wasn't just a playful remark anymore.

The ER had a way of demanding every ounce of focus, but tonight, it felt like the world was working against Jack. The cases piled up one after the other, the steady rhythm of the shift relentless, but none of it could distract him from the image of Samira in his head.

He had tried to shake off the electric tension that had charged the break room, but it clung to him like a second skin. Every time he glanced over, every time she moved, his mind wandered right back to the teasing words she'd thrown at him, the way her voice had dropped when she said she could make everything easy.

Jesus Christ, Jack thought, rubbing his eyes as another case came in. He was supposed to be focused on the patient — a young man with a dislocated shoulder and some scrapes — but all he could do was watch Samira as she moved to consult with a new patient.

Her posture was professional, her body fluid in the way only someone so skilled and confident could be. But it wasn't just the way she moved that held Jack's attention. It was the way she bent down to listen to the patient, her face close enough that he could see the soft curve of her neck, the gentle but firm way she held their attention. He thought about how it would feel to have his lips leave marks on her soft skin. There was something about the way she interacted with people, her calm but focused energy, that made him want to lose himself in it.

And then, when she looked up and caught his gaze — just for a moment, her eyes flickering over to his before returning to the patient — something in her expression shifted. It was subtle, but it was there. The air between them seemed to hum with an energy that had nothing to do with their surroundings. Jack swallowed hard, his pulse quickening.

His mind flashed with thoughts he had no business having. He imagined what it would be like to have her close, to finally close that space between them, to finally unhook that damn bra and ask her why she had that on tonight. His thoughts spiraled, and before he knew it, he was completely out of sync with the task in front of him.

"Dr. Abbot?" The voice broke through the fog of his thoughts, and he looked up to see the young man staring at him expectantly, his shoulder now set. "Am I good to go?"

Jack blinked, his mind struggling to catch up. "Yeah," he said, shaking his head a little. "You're good to go. Just follow up with your primary care in a few days, alright?"

"Thanks, doc," the patient said, giving him a tight smile before walking away. But Jack wasn't paying attention to him anymore. He was still watching Samira as she finished her consultation, the way she leaned over to adjust the patient's arm, the little touches that spoke volumes about how she cared. But *god*, did he want her hands all over him.

The sight of her — calm, collected, entirely in control — made something in Jack's chest tighten. *God, I want to touch her*, he thought, feeling a rush of heat spread through him. He wanted to feel the way her skin would react to his touch, to see that little smirk of hers turn into something more, something less playful, something darker.

Before he could stop himself, his thoughts turned sharper, imagining the way she might react to him pulling her close, pressing his lips to that soft curve of her neck, to finally closing the space between them that had seemed so impossible before. He forced himself to shake the thought away. This was insane. He couldn't afford to get distracted. Not in the ER, not with everything riding on his focus. But as Samira walked toward him now, her eyes meeting his again, the heat in his veins flared to life once more.

"Jack?" Samira's voice was low, but there was something there, something different. She paused just within arm's reach, her gaze steady on his.

"Yeah?" His voice was rougher than he'd intended, his words caught in his throat as his heart pounded against his ribs.

"You good?" she asked, her tone casual, but there was a flicker of something behind her eyes — something that made Jack's chest tighten further. She'd caught him. She knew. And she was playing with him.

He cleared his throat, trying to rein himself in. "Just... thinking," he muttered, forcing himself to focus on something, anything else. "You?"

"Same," she replied, and for a moment, they just stood there, the air around them crackling with unspoken words.

Samira tilted her head slightly, her gaze flicking down to his lips for a fraction of a second before returning to his eyes. Jack's body tensed, the desire to bridge the distance between them nearly overwhelming.

As Samira turned and walked off, Jack had to fight the urge to grab her, to pull her back into the moment where the world had narrowed to just the two of them. Instead, he stayed frozen for a beat longer, trying to regain control over his own thoughts before the next wave of chaos hit.

He couldn't keep ignoring it. Something was going to happen, and sooner rather than later, Jack knew he wasn't going to be able to walk away.

Hour 11

The trauma bay doors burst open, paramedics rushing in a teenager barely conscious, the monitors screaming with erratic vitals.

"Seventeen-year-old male," the medic shouted. "ODed — not sure on what. Narcan half-dosed, limited response."

Jack snapped into motion, pushing all the heat and chaos inside him aside. Work came first. Always. "Get him on O2, push another round of Narcan. Samira, get a line in."

"On it," she said, her voice sharp and professional, but when she moved past him to grab the supplies, her body brushed against his side — just a little too deliberately.

Jack gritted his teeth, ignoring the jolt that shot through him. The teen thrashed weakly as they worked, fighting the mask. Jack held him steady while Samira leaned in to find a vein, her arm grazing his as she moved. Her touch was light, fleeting, but it left a trail of fire along his skin.

"BP's crashing," someone said.

Jack forced himself to focus, barking out orders, adjusting the boy's airway, repositioning the mask. Samira slid past him again to grab a bag of fluids, her hip brushing his thigh this time — no accident. Jack almost growled under his breath. *She's doing this on purpose.*

Every move, every subtle lean, every ghost of a touch was a slow, torturous dance, and Samira knew exactly what she was doing. She didn't even have the decency to look innocent — when their eyes met for a brief second, she flashed him a tiny, wicked smile before turning back to spike the IV.

Jack's patience frayed by the second. His body was tense, wound

tight, his self-control hanging on by a thread.

"Push another 0.4," he barked to the nurse. "He's stabilizing — stay with him."

They worked in silence after that, coordinated chaos until, finally, the teen's vitals evened out. Jack let out a breath he hadn't realized he was holding as the monitors beeped steadily. He stepped back, stripping off his gloves, and turned to Shen.

"Shen," he said sharply, dragging the resident's attention to him. "Page me only if it's absolutely necessary for the next thirty minutes."

Shen blinked, wide-eyed. "Uh — yes, Dr. Abbot."

Without another word, Jack tossed his gloves into the bin, locking his gaze on Samira. She stood across from him, peeling off her own gloves, her posture casual — but her eyes glittered with challenge. Jack's voice dropped, rough with everything he was barely holding back. "Dr. Mohan," he said, stepping toward her.

Samira arched a brow, slow and unbothered. "Yes, Dr. Abbot?"

"Walk with me," he said, low enough that no one else could hear.

He didn't wait for a response. He just turned and walked out of the trauma bay, trusting — knowing — she would follow. He could hear the soft thud of her shoes behind him, felt her presence close and electric. His hands flexed at his sides as he led her down the hall, away from the noise, away from the eyes. His blood was pounding, hot and wild, with everything he had been bottling up since their

break room encounter and everything she had just pulled in that trauma room.

They rounded a corner, and went straight into the on call room. The second they were out of sight, Jack turned, his hand shooting out to catch her wrist, yanking her flush against him.

"You think you're funny, huh?" he said, voice low and dangerous near her ear. His other hand gripped her hip, hard enough to make her breath hitch.

Samira smiled up at him, slow, knowing. "I have no idea what you're talking about."

Jack's mouth was a breath from hers, their bodies pressed tight. "You've been driving me crazy all night."

"Good," she whispered, her lips almost brushing his.

"I don't...why me-." Jack asked but was quickly interrupted by her.

"Because you believed in me Jack," Samira admitted, sincerity washing over the mischievous glint she once had in her eyes, "When you let me do that risky procedure during the Pittfest MCI it was fucking exhilarating. You talked me through it and since then...I've been wanting to have you by my ear and talk me through every... single...thing."

Jack gave a low, rough laugh, the last of his restraint snapping like a live wire. "*You're gonna regret that*," he growled — right before he crashed his mouth onto hers. The kiss was brutal, all teeth and heat

and pent-up tension exploding between them, months of teasing and wanting pouring out at once. Samira gasped into him, and Jack took full advantage, sliding his hand into her hair, tilting her head back as he deepened the kiss, relentless.

She answered him just as fiercely, her fingers curling into his scrub top, pulling him closer until there was no space left between them. Jack barely remembered where they were — only that he needed more. Needed *her*. And this time, he wasn't letting her get away so easily.

Jack kissed her like he was starved for it — and in truth, he was. Months of wanting, weeks of torturous near-misses, and now after everything tonight, it was all pouring out at once. His hands roamed greedily, one tangled in her hair, the other sliding over her hip, her waist, savouring the feel of her under his palms. Samira responded with equal heat, her hands fisting the front of his scrub top before she shoved it up, slipping her fingers beneath the fabric to find bare skin. Jack hissed against her mouth, the feel of her touch lighting his nerves on fire.

"You drive me insane," he growled, dragging his lips down her jaw, her neck, biting lightly at the delicate skin there, "Walking in here with that gorgeous dress, making me wonder what lucky bastard had the privilege of being graced by you."

She tipped her head back, giving him more access, a soft, breathy sound escaping her throat that nearly made him lose it.

"And you," she gasped, threading her fingers through his hair, tugging just hard enough to make him groan, "*have no idea* how long I've been waiting for you to do something about it. I know you saw my bra and honestly...if the date had turned out well, I was hoping to..."

“Don’t finish that sentence,” he whispered against her lips as he kissed her over and over again, “Doesn’t matter if you dressed up for that douche, what matters is that I get to be the one to take it all off.”

“Well then, take it all off Jack,” Samira whispered against his ear.

Jack laughed low against her skin — a dark, rough sound — before grabbing her hips and spinning her, pinning her against the wall but making sure to support her back. The move knocked a gasp from her lips, her hands flying up to brace herself.

"You think you can tease me all night," Jack rasped against her ear, pressing his body into hers, letting her feel exactly what she was doing to him, "*and* get away with it?"

Samira’s answering smile was wicked, unrepentant. "Was hoping to."

Jack’s hand slid down, grabbing a handful of her ass and squeezing, making her bite her lip to stifle a moan. He leaned in, his mouth brushing her ear.

"Not a fucking chance."

Before she could shoot back a retort, he was kissing her again — rougher this time, desperate, devouring. His hand slipped beneath the hem of her scrub top, exploring the bare skin of her waist, her back, memorizing every inch he could reach. Samira arched into him, her body moving instinctively against his, chasing friction, chasing more.

"Jack," she whispered, breathless, her voice a plea and a demand all at once.

He groaned against her mouth, tugging her tighter to him. "Fuck, Samira. Tell me to stop," he muttered, even as he kissed a hot trail down her throat.

"Don't you *dare*," she said, her voice fierce.

That was all he needed.

His hand slid up her torso, fingers brushing the side of her breast, making her shiver. He wanted to feel her fully, wanted to hear her fall apart in his arms, but even he knew they couldn't take it *too* far right here. They were still technically on shift — barely hidden, moments from getting paged. But fuck, all the worries went straight out the window when Samira said, "What happened to taking it all off? Don't tell me you're hesitating now because you want to be a gentleman about it. We're in the 21st century Jack, you can be rough with me."

"Fuck, Samira," Jack cursed as he nearly tore her scrub top off when he took it off of her. It didn't help either when he finally got a full glimpse of her bra. The lace fabric was quite literally made for her and it perfectly cupped her breasts...not to mention how the colour perfectly complimented her brown skin. Without another word, Jack cupped them with his hands and kissed each breast, muttering against the soft skin, "Fuck, I could die right here...right now, and I'd die a happy man."

Samira chuckled as she moved to cup his jaw, forcing him to look at her, "I appreciate the compliment but how could you die a happy man now when you haven't been inside of me yet."

Jack cursed under his breath as he brought her in for another kiss, memorising every line and every curve that made it. "That mouth of

yours, who knew you had it in you?"

"I'm flattered you think I'm innocent but I have my needs, and I've been thinking about this for way too long. A woman deprived is a feral woman," Samira confessed as she carefully removed his scrub top, gasping ever so softly at how toned he was. Her fingers trailed from his neck, to his chest, down to his chiseled abdomen as she moved to put his back against the wall. Jack groaned at the very heat of her touch and watched as she slowly trailed a finger back up to rest under his chin to say, "Tell me what to do. You call the shots, tell me what you want."

Jack's brain was short-circuiting, he couldn't answer. Especially not now with the way Samira kissed his neck and started to trail kisses from his neck down to his abdomen, slowly bringing herself to a kneel as her hands settled on the waist band of his pants. She looked up at him expectantly but still he had no answer, so she started pulling his pants ever so slowly—the sheer friction of the fabric moving down was killing him that he finally said, "*Fuck*, Samira just take it all off and put your mouth on my cock."

Samira smiled at that, happy to hear the tone he usually used to bark orders. In one deft move, she took his pants and his underwear off to reveal an angrily hard cock. The tip was almost purple leaking with precome but most of all, it was fucking thick. Samira grabbed it with the utmost curiosity, trailing her fingers up and down to admire its length and girth. This was the kind of dick you see in pornos that make you wonder if it's real or just a prosthetic, Samira thought. She cursed under her breath because this was definitely real and it was going to hurt so good. "How is this supposed to fit—"

"Oh it'll fit baby, but I need your mouth first," Jack teased but raised a brow to see that Samira still hasn't moved. She gave him an equally challenging look and teased him back, "I'm not moving until you tell me what you want me to do. What's the procedure Dr. Abbot?."

Jack wanted to pinch himself so bad because he'd be really fucking mad if this was all just a dream and he was still alone in his bed. But when she gives the tip of his cock an experimental lick, he knew that he wasn't and he was living out his fantasies.

"Put your hand on the base," he instructed and Samira followed, earning a hiss of pleasure from him, "Then lick upwards from the shaft and swirl your tongue on the tip."

Samira did just that. Slowly, she licked a fat stripe up his shaft, savouring the sweet and salty taste of his cock and when she finally reaches the tip, she swirled her tongue on the underside and trailed a circular map up to his slit. Jack groaned and hit his head on the wall as he closed his eyes on the sheer pleasure and wetness of her tongue.

"Spit on it," he barely managed to say as he stroked Samira's hair as if to ground himself because the pleasure was coursing through him faster than air could enter his lungs. Samira was ever obedient and spit on his tip and decided to add some extra steps and stroke her spit up and down his length, tracing the veins with her thumb.

"*Fuck, baby*— put my cock in your mouth...*now*," he half-begged and half-commanded as Samira chuckled, hollowed out her cheeks and slowly took his cock in her mouth. She did it so slowly, adjusting to its size but Jack stroked her hair and said, "That's it baby, take your time, I know it's a lot but you can do it. *Fuck*. Just like that baby."

To his surprise, Samira moaned on his cock, taking pleasure on how it stretched her mouth. Jack couldn't close his eyes, he had to see. He had to see how the tears flowed from her eyes as she tried to take him all in. "It's okay baby, you don't have to go all the way in," he reassured but Samira only took it as a challenge and went deeper, tears flowing from her eyes at the strain but the moan sent vibrations through Jack's cock and he could barely contain himself.

“Samira, fuck I won’t last, *fuck*, I wanted this for too long to not be inside you,” Jack begged as he slowly guided her off his cock by her hair, closing his eyes again in pleasure at the whimper that left Samira’s lips as he pulled her off. He guided her back to have them face to face and swiped his thumb down her lip, pressing his hard weeping cock against her stomach, “That mouth of yours will be the death of me Samira...*fuck*, can you feel...no, do you feel how hard you make me. *You make me want to fuck you against every wall, every nook, every fucking corner of this hospital just to hear the pretty sounds you make.*”

Samira was too distracted, by the thumb on her lip and utterly lost in the pleasure of just staring at him. So distracted that she hadn’t realised the hook of her bra come off until she felt the cool air of the room waft over her nipples as she watched Jack throw away her bra. “The next time I see you in something like this,” he whispered against the curve of her breast, kissing every place except for her nipple to tease her, “You better know that I’ll make it my life’s mission to take it off.”

Samira nodded, desperate to have his tongue on the sensitive bud. She whined as he continued to tease her, cupping her breasts and kissing them but never putting his mouth where she wants it to be. “Please Jack,” she begged and he raised a brow at her and said, “I know baby, I just wanted to savour my dessert before I finish it.” Without missing a beat, Jack took her nipple in his mouth...experimentally grazing his teeth and the strangled moan that came out of Samira was enough to convince him that she really did like it rough.

His tongue swirled around her nipple, he didn’t care if they got caught...his tongue was going to memorise every inch of her body because he was ruined for anyone else. Jack grazed his teeth every now and then as he nipped and sucked at her nipples, switching between breasts like a starved man until Samira begged, “*Fuck*, Jack please...I need you inside me.”

He didn’t speak, Jack merely nodded and gestured for her to follow him to the couch. He kicked off his pants and sat like he was

expecting her to come crawling to him. The sheen of sweat on his body, the look of pure lust, and his long...thick...hard cock against his chiseled abdomen had Samira speechless. She couldn't believe a man like this would want her, but she wasn't going to start asking questions. Jack smirked at Samira's look of amazement and said, "Come here baby. You wanted to be told what to do so come here and ride my cock. Show me how much you really want it. I want to see you make your fantasies come true."

Samira bit her lip and deftly took the rest of her clothes off. Jack gave her an expectant look, beckoning her over with an outstretched hand to help her sit on his thighs. He kissed her again, desperate to feel her lips on his over and over again as he trailed his hand from her breasts to her taut stomach and down to her folds. Jack moaned into the kiss as he felt how wet she was for him. He pulled away from her lips and deftly put a finger in her pussy, earning a whimper from Samira as he said, "Baby...you got wet from sucking my cock? *Fuck*, you get off on me ordering you around? How am I gonna move around this fucking ER without thinking about fucking you until all you can remember is my name?"

Samira wasn't given any chance to respond because he added another finger, pumping them in and out, trying to find that sweet spot. She could barely speak but Samira thought about how the coarse texture of his fingers was already driving her crazy. He needs to know that, she thought. However, any thought she might have had left instantly vanished as another finger entered her pussy...stretching her to her limit as she moaned in pain and pleasure.

"You can take it baby," he reassured as he kissed her ear, whispering praises, "You're doing so well but...if you want to ride my cock, you better learn how to take it." Samira nodded as her pain diffused into pure ecstasy as Jack's fingers curled into the right spot that had her seeing stars. She braced a hand on his shoulder and muttered a flurry of curses under her breath as she began to ride his fingers.

Jack smiled in amusement and continued to whisper, "Why even bother going on that date if you were going to be completely undone

from just my fingers? You were looking in the wrong places baby—now you know where to look.” That was it. Samira never knew that Jack Abbot’s dirty mouth and war-ridden fingers were enough to make her come so hard that she thought her soul had left her body. Thankfully, Jack caught her by the small of her back as his fingers left her and asked, “You still with me?”

Samira nodded and Jack smiled, kissed her cheek then said, “Sure you can handle my cock baby? We can quit now-“

“No,” Samira managed to say as she tried to catch her breath, “I’m riding you and I’ll break this couch if I have to.”

“Fighting words Dr. Mohan,” Jack teased, “Now show me exactly that.”

Samira wasted no time and lined his tip against her soaked pussy, her walls were pulsating with need but she knew this was going to be a tight fit. The fat head of his cock was stubborn but her pussy eventually gave way and the mere pressure of her slowly sinking on his cock almost made her come again. Still, Jack never stopped staring at her, watching her bite her lip as his cock stretched her so much that Samira felt like she was being split in half.

“That’s it baby, you’re doing so good. You look so pretty like this,” Jack said as his hands moved to her hips, almost like he was helping her fully sit on his cock. When he was finally to the hilt, Samira buried her face on the crook of his neck...breathing hard. How his cock had stretched her walls made her feel so full and it felt so good.

“*Fuck*, you are so big,” Samira cursed again, trying to restrain herself from coming right then and there.

“I know,” Jack replied in earnest as he grabbed her by the neck to guide her to another kiss. She tried to kiss him again but he pulled away and said, “Ride my cock baby, you know I told you to.” Samira nodded, she didn’t care if this was the biggest cock she’s ever had because she’ll follow whatever Jack tells her to do.

Slowly, Samira began to move up and down his cock. It was so agonisingly slow that it was a hazy mix between torture and pleasure for Jack. His fingers tightened on her hips as he struggled to stop himself from thrusting up to meet her. He let her adjust to him because he see the wincing on her face but as soon as her face relaxed and her lips parted to produce those sweet moans he loves to hear— Jack knew he needed to take control. He moved to whisper in her ear and ask, “I’m going to take matters into my own hands now baby. You gonna let me?”

Samira nodded almost immediately and that was enough for Jack.

“I’m going to fuck you until all you can remember is my name,” he whispered against her ear, “I’m going to fuck you into forgetting that you ever wanted anybody else.” Jack grabbed Samira’s hips and pinned her to his cock as he drove into her relentlessly. The blend of his weeping cock and her dripping pussy made an obscene squelch with every thrust, it was loud....untamed, and so so good.

“Jack! Unhh!”

“Jack!”

“Jack, mmhh, fuck I-“

“That’s it baby. Moan my fucking name. I don’t care if this whole hospital hears,” he continued to mutter against her ear, “I want them

to know who made you like this. *I made you like this.*”

Samira had already been lost in her ecstasy, she could not think, she could barely speak, and she could only see and feel him. When he sunk his teeth into her neck to leave a mark, that was enough to push her over the edge again, the pain and the pleasure was torturous but divine. She clenched around him and screamed his name but Jack would not stop.

“Come on baby, tell me you’re mine,” Jack commanded and Samira could barely string thoughts together. Jack hadn’t stopped in his relentless pace and she could not think about anything except his cock inside her.

“Jack, please, I can’t-“

“Mmmh, ah- Jack- I-“

“Use your words baby, tell me you’re mine,” he commanded again and Samira barely managed to say in between her moans, “*I...mmh..* Jack, I’m yours.”

If this fucked up world wouldn’t kill him, the thought of depriving his cock from her would have. The taste of her lips, the feeling of her pussy clenching on his cock, the feeling of her body against his—it was his own slice of paradise. Of course she would be his unravelling—she looked like a dream, she felt like heaven, she sounded like an angel, and she tasted of everything that he ever wanted. Still, he chased her pleasure, driving into her again and again until all that left her lips was his name.

Samira moaned Jack’s name over and over again. Chanting it like a prayer.

The sound of it was akin to worship, and the constant clenching of her tight walls was enough to send him over the edge, “*Fuck*, Samira. I-I’m gonna come- Where do you want me-“

“In me...Jack, *mmmh*, In me please,” she moaned

“But-“

“I don’t care.”

And Jack Abbot let himself fall. He didn’t have time to think he moaned into her neck as he came in her, filling her to the brim. “*Fuck*, Samira.”

Samira allowed herself to catch her breath. She didn’t know how many times she came but she didn’t care. This was the best sex of her life. Still, she craved him, so she brought him in for another kiss. “Jack Abbot, you’ve ruined me. I probably look ruined.”

Jack shook his head and kissed her again, muttering against her lips with every kiss, “No, you’re always a picture of elegance Samira Mohan. Doesn’t matter if you’re in a pretty dress or in our regular scrubs.”

Samira laughed and rested her forehead against his. “Jack,” she said softly, “If this is just going to be casual for you, I need to know because I don’t-“

“Don’t finish that sentence,” Jack interrupted, cupping her face so

gently, “Samira Mohan, this is never going to be casual for me. Any man would be foolish to never want to commit to you.”

“I can count a couple of times that was the case-“

“Oh yeah? That’s because they don’t appreciate who you are like I do,” Jack said with so much sincerity that it made Samira’s heart start beating fast again, “You’re the smartest woman in any room you walk in Samira. Any man would be lucky to stand by your side. I want to be that man.”

“I wouldn’t want anyone else,” Samira answered, smiling like a giddy school girl who just found out that her crush liked her back, “But first, you have to take me out to dinner.”

Jack smiled at her smile. He wanted to burn the image of her smile in the back of his head. He kissed her again then said, “I’d take you out every night if you wanted me to. I’d give you anything you want.”

“Like we have time to go out every night. We’re practically embedded into this hospital,” Samira snorted as she joked and Jack chuckled at her snort, saying, “I would always make time for you. I’ve wanted you for too long, there is not a single chance that I’d allow myself to fuck this up or let you go.”

Samira smiled, she truly smiled. In fact, she couldn’t stop smiling because of him. Just as she was about to kiss him again, the door of the on-call room burst open, revealing a frustrated Dr. Shen.

“Dr. Abbot, I know you told me to page you only when absolutely necessary but you can’t just leave me to chart alone. You’re drowning me here- *OH MY GOD?! WHAT THE HELL?!“*

Jack immediately scrambled to cover Samira's breasts by hugging her as Dr. Shen turned around to give them some semblance of privacy. Shen laughed to himself as he said, "Nice tits, Mohan."

"Shen, I'm gonna do your head in-" Jack yelled.

"*Relax*, it was just a joke," Shen said as he tried to control his laughter, "*Fuck*, this is just too funny. I know I told you not to waste time but I didn't think you'd work this quick-"

"Shen I swear to god-", Jack tried to scold but Shen quickly cut him off, "Woah woah woah, I'm not the one who just got caught having sex in the on-call room of all places. You better have a good offer for me or I'm telling Dana."

"I'm not offering you shit-"

"Tick tock. Tick tock," Shen teased and Jack groaned then said, "Fine! I'll pay your damn Dunkin' Donuts orders for the rest of the week."

"Hell no, a month!" Shen counter-offered and Jack relented, "Fine, now get the hell out of here so we can get dressed." Shen snickered one last time and left the room. Samira couldn't help but burst into laughter and so did Jack, this entire thing was so ridiculous to them—but so perfect.

"You know he's still gonna tell," Samira pointed out in between chuckles. Jack nodded, grinning at how beautiful she looked with her skin glistening with sweat, "I'm fine with that. At least they'll all know you're mine."

Hour 12

The final hour of the night shift had always been a drag — fatigue settling into everyone's bones, caffeine wearing off, patience fraying. But for Jack and Samira, the exhaustion barely registered. They sat across from each other at the nurses' station, both buried in charting — or pretending to be. Samira twirled her pen idly between her fingers, sneaking glances at Jack over her tablet. Her lips curved in the faintest smirk every time she caught him already looking.

Jack, for his part, looked like he was trying to chart but kept forgetting how to type every time Samira shifted in her seat, crossed her legs, or so much as licked her bottom lip. She was radiant, even in wrinkled scrubs and with post-on-call-room hair. He kept thinking about how her skin had tasted, how her body had responded to his touch, how she had said his name like it belonged to her.

He was a goner. And he didn't care.

"Jesus Christ," Shen muttered from beside them, typing furiously. "Would you two just *have sex again* so we can get some peace?"

Samira bit back a laugh, ducking her head behind her chart. "Didn't realize we were being so loud."

"You're not," Shen said flatly. "You're just... *radiating something*. Like a disgusting, glowing, post-coital... aura. I'm sitting in your sex haze. It's *visceral*."

Jack smirked without looking up. "You could just move."

“Oh, sure,” Shen drawled. “And let you two eye-fuck each other in peace? I don’t think so. If I have to suffer, I’m taking you both down with me.”

Samira laughed under her breath. “You’re so dramatic.”

“Dramatic? I walked in on your boobs, Mohan. I have PTSD. I mean, they are nice but for my own safety, I’m gonna pretend I feel harassed.”

“They were covered!” Jack shot back.

“Barely,” Shen said, waving a hand like he was fanning himself. “I was assaulted. *Assaulted.*”

Jack shook his head, biting back a grin as he scribbled down vitals. “You know you’ll live.”

“Only because I’m bargaining with God and an espresso,” Shen deadpanned. “You owe me more than donuts and coffee now. I want... I don’t know. A new stethoscope. A noise-canceling headset. A *raise.*”

“I’m not Gloria you buffoon,” Jack replied, amused.

“That won’t stop me from blackmailing you,” Shen said with a wink.

Samira turned toward Jack, her voice softening. “You know, if you

keep making those eyes at me, I'm not responsible for what happens when we're alone again."

Jack leaned back in his chair, unabashed, letting his gaze sweep over her slowly, thoroughly. "That's exactly what I'm counting on."

Shen made a strangled noise. "Okay, I'm moving. I'm moving, I'm out. I hope HR catches you both. I'm gonna start leaving anonymous complaints."

"Do it," Jack said, eyes still on Samira. "At least HR will know I finally got the girl."

Samira blushed — actually *blushed* — and Jack felt a surge of something fierce and possessive in his chest. The minutes ticked down. The charting continued. But under it all, the tension between them never eased — a slow, delicious current humming beneath the fluorescent lights and sterile white noise of the ER.

And when the clock finally struck shift's end, Jack closed his chart with a snap, stood, and reached for her hand without a word. Samira didn't hesitate.

"Don't come back pregnant!" Shen called after them as they disappeared down the hall.

Jack flipped him off without looking back, and Samira just laughed.

They were barely two steps out of the ER when the automatic doors slid open, and in walked Robby and Dana, both looking way too chipper for the hour.

“Oh *my God*,” Dana said the moment she saw them. “Would you look at that. Our favourite sinners, caught in the act of walking each other out.”

Robby raised a brow, eyeing the way Jack’s hand lingered a little too naturally at the small of Samira’s back.

“They’re glowing. Like they just came back from a spiritual retreat. Or a *very* intense cardio session,” Dana continued to tease.

Jack sighed. “You two want to get out of the doorway so the rest of the staff doesn’t get caught in the crossfire?”

“Nope,” Dana said cheerfully. “I want to bask in this for just a *little* longer.”

Samira rolled her eyes, but she was smiling. “We’re not that obvious.”

“Samira,” Robby said with mock seriousness, “you’ve got a hickey on your neck.”

She immediately reached for it, eyes wide, while Jack just groaned and muttered, “Goddamn it.”

Dana clutched her chest dramatically. “Do you have any idea how long I’ve been waiting for this to happen?”

“Alright, alright,” Jack said, steering Samira gently forward as they tried to pass, “make way. You’ve had your fun.”

“Oh, I’m not done,” Dana called after them. “If I find out you two used hospital linens, I’m filing a complaint with sterilization.”

Jack turned around, still walking backwards. “We’ll make the trip to HR ourselves, thanks. Save you the trouble.”

Robby simply shook his head while Dana hollered, “Tell Cheryl we say hi!”

They stepped out into the crisp morning air just as the sky began to blush with the first rays of sunrise, painting the horizon in gentle golds and pinks. It was quiet outside, peaceful, the kind of quiet that came only after a long night and right before the world stirred back to life.

Jack stopped for a moment, taking it in. The cool breeze, the warmth of her shoulder brushing his. She looked up at him, eyes soft, her smile unguarded in the pale light.

“We should probably get some sleep,” she murmured.

Jack nodded, then gave her a sidelong glance and said, “We should.”

A beat passed. Then he added, “But there’s this little place a couple

blocks from here. Opens early. Makes a *damn good* breakfast sandwich.”

Samira's smile widened, slow and sure. “You taking me on a date, Dr. Abbot?”

He grinned. “Maybe I am.”

“Then lead the way.”

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